

A black and white photograph of a night sky. A bright crescent moon is visible in the upper center. The right side of the image is filled with the dark, silhouetted branches of trees. The overall tone is dark and atmospheric.

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NUMBER 98 ✧ DECEMBER 2016

A black and white photograph of a tree's canopy. The image is dominated by dark, silhouetted branches and leaves against a bright, overexposed sky. The branches are intricate and crisscross the frame. Several leaves are visible, some showing signs of being eaten, with small holes. The text is overlaid in the upper-middle section of the image.

So now the band plays on,
you got one life,
blaze on . . .

--Phish, 2016.

December 22, 2016

11:15 am.

On board Hartford, CT.-
to - Boston, MA Peter Pan bus

— Donald Trump, I believe you are a brute & a bully. You ran a scorched earth campaign for President, & you won enough Electoral College votes to clinch the election. But more who voted overall, voted for Hillary Clinton than you. You won based on a system that is unlike how we in the U.S. elect any other major office.

But you won nonetheless, & like the brute & bully you are, you embellished this into a mandate to do whatever you please. Yet, though you appealed to millions of people as somehow "different," an "outsider," you've proceeded to select oil men, corporate tycoons, & insiders of all kinds for your Cabinet nominees. Men, mostly, & a few women who will work to shrink the social safety net at every turn, & find new & old ways to make money for themselves & their kind.

-49-

You were able to bamboozle just enough people into believing that a white male billionaire knows, & in your case cares, about the lives & struggles of most Americans. You conned enough people into thinking that your career of trucking in real estate & other businesses in the U.S. & abroad, from your massive tower in Manhattan, sums to an "outsider" to the establishment.

American elections are blood-mean things, survived by a combination of charisma & cruelty. You crushed your weaker opponents; that's what you had to do, given that you've never served in public office.

But you also threatened & encouraged violence toward women, Muslim-Americans, Hispanics, & members of the press. Like the brute & bully that you are, your fist of words pummeled anyone in your way. These are the same people who will be watching you take the oath of office for President in 2017. Unlike when you run your companies as you will, you can't fire Americans. Maybe you will fry. Will you?

-50-

That's the question I can't answer right now, a month before you take that oath. When things start to go wrong for you, when you, like every other President, have to compromise, sometimes accept defeat. When you see your poll numbers tank, & the protests in the street, & the millions who didn't vote for you fail to stand down & cower when you rage & threaten them.

Will you "fire" us with restrictions of civil liberties, deportations, police state tactics? Or is there any chance you will stop, take a breath, another, & try to listen, take a real honest look at the damage you are doing? And humility, & its wisdom, within you?

Even a bully & a brute can change, can learn from experience. That's my hope for you, Donald Trump, that somewhere in you is someone who would rather be a better, more decent human being, than the last man standing in a room full of bodies. I'll keep this hope for now. @12/22/2016





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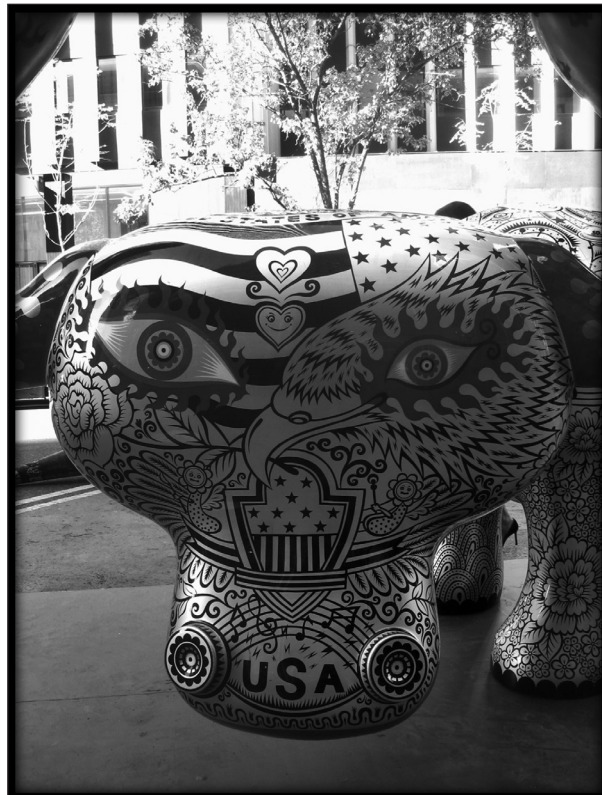
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Thank you to Dr. Isaac of Manhattan, for your wonderful, timely, and competent dentist work, when it was needed the most.



Feedback on Cenacle 97 | October 2016

From Tom Sheehan:

Jimmy Heffernan's "The Paradox of Hunter-Gatherer Consciousness" is a classic essay for a fisherman like myself who fished the Pine River in New Hampshire for over 30 years, subsisting on what we caught and never brought home, remembering what a game warden said to us on one trip: "We know you guys are the ones who leave the place cleaner than you found it." Our favorite critic ever.

Judih Haggai's dozen of little poetry eggs score well with my breakfast (*des œufs brouillés*) this morning, and carry a day through to her poetical declarations.

Six pages of Seamus Heaney make any magazine find my applause. I recall the honor of being asked to introduce him at St. Ignatius Church, Boston College, in the early '80s, to a standing room crowd, and telling him at dinner later that he'd gain the Nobel Prize someday, and retaining yet his gracious smile.

* * * * *

From Joe Coleman:

I can't take my eyes off Kassi Soulard's photograph of the dragonfly which decorates the cover of *Cenacle 97*.

This makes shaving and driving dangerous, makes eating meals messy, and obviates watching television. I ordinarily use my eyes for these other things. Perhaps I should put this *Cenacle* on the shelf for a while . . . I can't take my eyes off that dragonfly!

It's just such a fine photograph in so many ways:

- a strong, slightly offset diagonal
 - vertical subject with detail in sharp focus
 - two balanced color fields as an autumnal soft-focus background
 - perfect dimensions for cover layout reproduction
- to name a few.

Kassi shared with me how the dragonfly seemed to wait patiently for the snapshot. She has perfectly captured a delicate moment the less attentive or perceptive would doubtless disregard: a fragile, frozen vision for us to view.

Kassi's photographs in *The Cenacle* regularly delight and enchant me. *Cenacle 97*, as usual, deploys her skills. I feel gifted to enjoy glimpses of our world as she sees it. I hope she doesn't take her eyes off the world.

* * * * *

From Colin James:

"The Dead Cat Incident" by Charlie Beyer is a darkly humorous story. One of the things I found interesting was the tone of the introductory letter to the judge, stating his case by explaining how he was being unfairly prosecuted and his letter's unreasonable faith in rationality. The Judge's.

"The stink of existentialism" prevails, only the powerful manage to float above the odor for a short time, and the excess of bad luck that mounts until the protagonist is metaphorically covered in his own shit. It's everywhere, man. It's all around us.

His profession as a hovercraft salesman, where the vehicle he sells symbolically floats on water and is not immersed in it, speaks to the lack of responsibilities faced.

Ultimately, some sense of self-worth is restored by innocence and luck, or is it perseverance?

Faith again. But is this a religious faith or a faith in humanity? The innocence of the high school youths could symbolize naivety or acceptance of one's lot. I enjoy Charlie's writing, and I can get into the flow rather quickly, anxious to see how things will turn out.

* * * * *

From Judih Haggai:

Charlie Beyer, of “The Dead Cat Incident,” *are you kidding me?* In a voice of utter logic and complete linearity, you describe incident after incident of absurdity. You are Kafka, you are Brautigan. Your narration led me firmly away from my current state of flu into some land where nothing can be expected except the stupidity of others and the impossibility of the Establishment.

I thank you, for each and every step into a world where looking glass is precisely exaggerated, somehow to the point of comfort.

* * * * *

From Jimmy Heffernan:

The standout for me in *Cenacle 97* is Victor Vanek’s lovely vignette, “A Single Fletching.” Evoking a phantasmagoria of exotic and ephemeral entities, both real and imagined, I found this work to be a fun delight. Following the odyssey of the “one who could never be again unseen,” mystical overtures unfold in the desperate search to learn even a little bit more about this beguiling spirit. Through the Pine Elfin butterflies we finally make contact with the enchantress, in whose presence there is a *flash* of insight. This naturally creates a species of faith that cannot be shaken. Indeed, we’re all just going on faith that anything has anything to do with anything, really. And Vanek’s piece has everything to do with the subtle truth that this path is the more sanguine.

* * * * *

From Charlie Beyer:

I find Jimmy Heffernan’s discussion of Hunter-Gatherers (HG), compared to modern “Vertically”-oriented religion, to be a fascinating discussion. I even agree with some of it, although it leaves me disturbed that “vertical” idolotry trumps “awareness of the immanence of the here and now.” And there is also the fact that HGs do have animal gods, such as coyote and others.

Regardless of my internal arguments with the essay, I greatly enjoyed the in-depth analysis of the differences between a “wild man” and the “civilized” slave to the “vertical” [bureaucratic] religions. Long live “Fusion with the absolute”!

* * * * *

From Kassi Soulard:

I thought that Jimmy Heffernan’s essay, “The Paradox of Hunter-Gatherer Consciousness” was a very novel and welcome piece in *Cenacle 97*. His explanations of the differences between vertically-oriented vs. horizontally-oriented spiritualities really resonated with me, and this chapter from his book piqued my interest greatly. Especially where he writes: “HG societies are marked by an emphasis on focus while domesticated societies are distinguished by an emphasis on the boundary.”

He mentions a few times how the paradox of the HGs’ horizontally-oriented schema may be hard for us to relate to, which is certainly true, but I’d like to think that making the effort to relate to such a novel way of seeing the world would help us appreciate our planet more, learn to work together better, and understand each other in new and creative ways.

* * * * *

From Nathan D. Horowitz:

When you look at the October 2016 *Cenacle* cover, you see at the top this retro, early-Internet title, which has a smudged, black-hole-sun quality. And then, as you look down, the page becomes an open window onto a garden in which there is a huge dragonfly right up next to the window.

The Epigraph page looks like a window onto a miniature world. I feel I could reach my hand in and touch the tiny rocks and the tiny, cool water of the tiny lake.

Page 2: That amazing ballet dance of a forest in black and white. The precise positions of the

lichen-coated ballerina's arms. Who can doubt that plants dance? All seems poised to leap. The trees are willing to instruct us, if we'll pay attention.

Page 29: *Love not Regret*: Let's all write our poems on firewood and photograph it.

Page 30: That mad wonderful tangle-of-mirrored-doors photo. When you smash a mirror, you make more mirrors.

Page 36 has the excellent dog skull. The detail in it is so nice that the eye wants to linger on the teeth, on the porous bones of the skull. The bared fangs still have the power to jolt me each time I look at the image.

Oh, but those two poems by Colin James— "Fat Shaming" and "Establishing, Then Severing, All Communiques"—rang for me like church bells. Or lit up my head like weird, wonderful miniature mind movies.

* * * * *

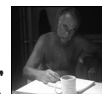
From Martina Newberry:

The Cenacle is a big gulp of air after being under water.

* * * * *







Mechno Madness

[Travel Journal]

i.

There was only a two-week leave from the imprisoning corporate world to establish my multi-million dollar gem mine, and begin my life in the luxurious style that I deserved. The vacation time was pitifully accumulated over a year of enslavement. Already I had frittered away some days in Seattle, visiting long forgotten people who barely remembered me.

I arrived in Idaho with the expectation of a few hours' stop to collect Jack (or JJ as I call him) and his equipment, then to drive madcap over to my sapphire claims in Montana. As I pulled up to JJ's driveway, a swarm of the neighbors' pit bulls were leaping and snapping at my truck door. A landscape of partly dismembered machinery greeted my eyes between the dogs' swirling electron antics. Parts and tools were scattered evenly between the eviscerated steel hulks. Oily paper towels blew playfully around in the mechanical carnage.

JJ's legs stuck out from beneath a relic mowing machine. Presently, he clambered out and greeted me. He was hot, red, and sweaty. His crimson skin painted with smears of black grease like a Holstein cow. I have a vision of the mowing machine gumming him in its rubber jaws, slobbering inky oil.

Looking out over his hay field was a sad thing. Although the hay was in windrows, only twenty percent was baled. The baler was collapsed beside me, a few long chain things draping out of it onto the ground from a previous mechno (slang for mechanical) disembowelment.

"Yo, JJ. Where we at?" I greeted.

JJ Jitters, sand box buddy and one-man farm. The man is constantly fidgeting with everything, glancing nervously over his shoulder, and startling at sudden noises. A well-accomplished self-made mechanic. Competent, but beleaguered by the Murphy's law (If anything can go wrong, it will).

A long monologue erupts from JJ after an initial guttural greeting. He bewails the chronological events of mechno dysfunction. This included all the various patch-and-scab-together attempts. The baler needed new bearings. The mower had broken its main shaft in half. The tractor ran fitfully. The backhoe needed a new head gasket and other miscellaneous parts. No method of moving the round bales had been invented yet. The big hay truck was so seriously broken, it was crossed off the repair list. This was more like World War II Dresden than a farm. The few hours of delay I had anticipated stretched into days of grueling repair. The frustration was so intense—I trembled with rage and hopelessness.

Cold and dripping from a heavy dew, I awake in the hay field. Stiffly, the dog and I drive fifteen miles to a genetically deprived village for some thin but warm coffee at a local café. The waitresses and the cook both have a very projected brow with a mop of thick bushy hair.

"Summin' more, buddy?" the simian waitress asks.

“Ah no, this will be fine,” I say as I hunch over the steaming cup. I furtively glance about the café. Everyone seems to have the protruding brow and the animal hair thing. Either I’m in a cultural anthropology experiment or the Twilight Zone. I gotta figure the latter.

The furrowed brows are eyeing me suspiciously. They can tell I’m not “one of them.” “Oh, could I please get this coffee to go?” I ask humbly. Get my butt outta there before I become part of a cave painting.

The morning progresses at JJ’s shop in the village where I build six-foot spears onto the backhoe for round bale retrieval. The afternoon and evening are spent in the testing and modifying and, finally, the application of the erratic invention.

JJ cleverly manages to reconstruct the baler by mid-morning, still short a half dozen pieces after two runs to a parts store. Many stops are required throughout the day to operate the device, each accompanied by much torching, welding, grinding, and banging. Smelling of burnt steel, ears singing a shrill song, the dog and I sleep under the hay truck to avoid some of the dew.

The next day comes and goes with minor advances. All the hay is still not baled due to the string mechanism being inept and dumping the whole mass of hay on the ground in a pile.

ii.

We give the farm a rest and go to purchase some huge planks from a disoriented Viet Nam vet, Saigon Sam. This commando has returned to the family farm, the prodigal son, but the family has fled his presence, in terror. He leaps from his bed at night, emptying the clip of an automatic weapon, screaming “gooks in the wire, gooks in the wire!” The other family members politely said they understood, while packing frantically.

Saigon Sam collects anything metal. His place has larger mounds of mangled machinery than JJ’s, the difference being that he does not care. The veteran still wears a filthy military coat with his rank and lightning bolts sewn under the grime. His eyes are a pale, glowing blue, crazy eyes, emanating a sharp light from his otherwise dismally begrimed presence.

We load the huge planks while talking pleasantries. We will use the planks to drive the backhoe out onto in the sapphire-bearing swamp where we will do our test digging.

Saigon’s only friend comes out of the house, a full grown deer. It nuzzles among us like a dog until given grimy carrots from an ammo sling Sam wears. He had shot its mother when it was a day old, thinking that mom might be sneaking up with an explosive charge strapped to it. In realization and remorse, he raised the wobbly creature to maturity. The deer tries to climb into the truck cab for a ride. A usual activity for it when Sam makes a beer run. It must be persuaded with more grimy carrots to go do something else.

iii.

Another unfinished item we must attend to is the repair of the neighbor’s car. Recently, JJ’s nephews had been visiting the farm. Being a busy man, JJ gave them a case of firecrackers and told them to go play next door with the pit bulls. While the little darlings were in an unsupervised pyrotechnic frenzy, they found it convenient to light the ordinance inside the neighbor’s car, out of the wind. This led to a seat-to-seat cracker fight, whose sparks and smoldering ignited the already ragged upholstery. The car incinerated to a blackened sheet

metal skeleton while the panicked nephews tried unsuccessfully to hook up the garden hose.

Much blame and a “stern talking to” was dispensed by Uncle Jack, but the precious adolescents were not much fazed. They played and argued over their Game Boy through most of the lecture. The innocents firmly believed that it was an “accident” and, after all, they were told to go have fun. Clearly it was Uncle Jack’s problem. No accurate confession was ever forthcoming. Consequently, the burden of neighborly restitution fell upon our dwindling time frame.

It was the heat of the day in the country junkyard where we went to get parts. Every mirror and car hood reflected the sun into a punishing ground temperature. Only one person was around, who knew nothing, and did not feel authorized to let us in. There was the big overhanging brow again. JJ called the owner at the village bar using the newest device, radio-phone, and confirmed our trespass.

It struck me as a strange image, JJ jumping up on top of a dead car body for reception, unconsciously doing the two-step on the roof—the rural Neanderthal leaning lethargically on the car hood, his eyes vacant, his jaw slack—JJ pacing the car roof intently, tossing the futuristic cell phone from one restless hand to the other. This is the edge where space-time technology meets the graveyard of Cro-Magnon mechanical might.

Clearance was gained to the treasured hulks with much cellular discussion. Without haste, three of the car species requested are identified. A seat from this one, steering column from that one, windows from another, door panels, mirrors, seat belts, glove box, ashtray, etc., etc. All the little unnoticed parts that make the inside of a car.

We were, however, not unnoticed by the junkyard dog. The mixed breed strutted stiff-legged in a semi-circle around us, one lip retracting over a yellowed fang as its insecurity ebbed and flowed.

We get the expected answer from the ape at the gate when questioned about price. “I dunno?” We go into the village to the town bar and pull the junkyard owner out. He is even shorter and hairier than the rest. It looks like you could pound in fence posts with that brow. The guy probably does.

Drunken negotiations take about an hour to haggle a price. Some parts are extremely valuable. As we finally leave, we hear the finagler announce, “Drinks are on me, Joe Peck!”

Actually, it’s JJ that is footing the bill. The whole parts program takes five hours. Miraculously, JJ finishes baling the hay as the red sun sets into the fields around us, concluding our 18-hour day.

iv.

We leave at 6 AM the next day for Spokane, some 90 miles away. This is not the sapphire trip; this is to retrieve another mechanical monstrosity that has been repaired here in a machinist’s shop. With the device, we will reconstruct a swather that lays gutted in JJ’s driveway. I can hardly wait for such excitement.

We collect the mechanism and get back by noon with only a few delays for bearings, gaskets, etc. The item weighs 300 pounds, and is quite unwieldy. After an hour or so, we have jostled it into position. It doesn’t fit. Measure this end, measure that end, move it a half inch that way, move it one inch the other way, take some gears off, put some gears back on, still does not fit.

Despair. Much discussion, more jockeying. No fit. Panic is in order. JJ calls the machine shop. Yes, they were a little fuzzy after the 4th of July weekend. Yes, they did chop the wrong end off. Yes, they did forget to measure it before they hacked it up. Yes, it will cost more to have it corrected. No, they can't do it for a week. We disengage the part and load it into my truck on top of the stagnant mining equipment. We will deliver it back to the machine shop tomorrow. Why them? Why us?

At this point, all the piddly jobs are done. Now it's time to pack up and get the hell out of this farming delay. The rest of the evening we spend collecting up JJ's stuff. Of course, doing some miscellaneous mechanics is required. Change the oil and filters in the truck and backhoe. Repair the backhoe muffler. Change the tires on the truck. Check and adjust the pressure in truck and trailer tires (fourteen of them).

On and on, the idea of more mechanics has me dry heaving. I want to scream, but I don't want JJ to check the PSI of my lungs and declare I need a new valve.

Dawn at last. I'm cramped from sleeping in the cab of the truck due to midnight rain showers. My dog sleeps on top of me to keep above the swirling, marauding pit bulls that patrol the ground outside. My dog is like a sailor climbing the mast of the sinking ship in shark-infested waters. I feel grimy and smelly like a homeless person, but am excited that we're leaving at last. Six hours to the Montana gem-fields, maybe add on an hour here or there, get there by early afternoon. No problem.

v.

We roll out. We roll on. Two men and each his dog. Things are smooth to Spokane where we drop off the 300-pound screwed-up swather part. We go to a parts store and JJ decides that this is the best time and place to rewire the trailer. A simple task really, he asserts. Three hours later, we have brake lights and the greatest electrical conundrum of all time—turn signals.

Got to gas up the main tank, the side tank, the backhoe, the gas drum, the five-gallon cans, and my truck. Two hundred and eighteen dollars of buck-a-gallon gas later, we leave Spokane.

We crawl along. JJ stops every thirty to forty miles to check this or that. All the weigh stations are visited whether we need to or not. Some sort of DOT regulation-compliance-paranoia thing going on here. At each station JJ prostrates himself on the ground before the petty official. They tell him to please move his truck out of the way and pull his psycho self together. Don't even want to weigh him. Another forty miles, he has to try again.

The truck begins to smoke lightly twenty miles from Montana. Gruelingly, we climb over Lookout Pass and into Montana at 15 MPH. Twenty miles into the big state, the electrical controls of the truck brakes fry with a cloud of smoke that fills the cab of Mr. Jitters' truck. We spend two hours tracing the wiring until we find a fine fat one welded to the frame from the heat.

After that is disengaged, JJ has to stop three times in the next hundred miles for naps. He is badly drugged by the smoke from burning wire insulation. His eyes are half-closed while trying to talk. I have never seen him so relaxed. He falls asleep instantly when we stop and he lies down in a patch of roadside weeds.

Eventually, we get going again. We're in Missoula now, seventy miles to go, 6 PM. We

are in a small mall area that has a grocery and an auto parts store for our delight and cathartic shopping. I go to buy groceries while JJ goes on a spree at the parts store. They love him. He gets a dozen fuel filters, spark plugs, air filters, various valves, wires, clamps, and orders a few \$50 parts for pick up on the way back. I buy \$220 worth of groceries for the short vacation time we have left.

Am going to have to do a lot of anxiety-eating while I watch JJ install all those parts. As I load the groceries into the truck, I notice that most of the major components are stripped off the truck engine. JJ has found a broken spark plug that has him dancing in delight. I replace four fuel filters in the hope of speeding things up. Housewives load their supplies into SUVs all around us. I drop the air cleaner housing with a sudden clatter. JJ springs vertically off the engine, and smacks his head on the raised hood. We roll on.

JJ says he doesn't need gas. Five miles from our turn-off, the trailer blows a tire. The truck is also out of gas. For some reason, this heap of a truck can't use the normal fuel that is in the barrel. It needs special gas. In a stroke of luck, we have a can of octane booster with us, which it greedily drinks.

Dark now, we press on. Buy another \$50 of fuel five miles down the road. Oddly, we don't dismantle an engine or drive system or anything else at this gas station. I think because it's finally time to drink and drive. This is Montana after all, and it's legal here. We need to get blotto in a big way. The next thirty miles takes an hour and a half, winding through the hills, but we finally arrive on the sapphire claim.

Pitch black. We roll out the sleeping bags and I tie my dog next to me. JJ instantly falls asleep. I'm wide-eyed with road buzz. JJ's untied dog goes prowling, and soon flushes some large animal. My dog and I hear the panicked hoof beats of the thousand-pound invisible creature charging straight at us.

With a wrenching sound, the beast hits the barbed wire fence ten feet away. It thrashes, snorts, and flails in the wire for a minute before snapping through and crashing into the matted brush beyond. Through the pounding of the terrorized blood in my ears, I hear JJ's oblivious snores.

vi.

We awake in a thick gray fog. Little knobs of ice have formed all over the dog and the sleeping bag. We get some hot water boiling for coffee on a Coleman stove while assessing our situation. JJ unloads the backhoe and begins changing out its grease Zerk and expansion pins. He skips a little as he moves back and forth between the truck and the backhoe.

Before I'm down to the last sip of coffee, the Forest Service Ranger, with whom I have made an appointment, shows up. We walk over the proposed dig-site, discussing the planned holes and the proposed reclamation. He says he'll lower the bond cause I'm such a cooperative guy—come on into town and pay up. Cash. Probably the Forest Ranger Beer Fund.

The Ranger's name is Kirk Knievel, motorcycle stuntman Evel Knievel's cousin. I ask him about the cuz. He says Evel isn't jumping much lately, except for bail and his secretary. Evel's son is now carrying on the family flying performances. The young one leapt forty buses in Las Vegas last week, but only broke three bones. Sort of a disappointing show. Doesn't really have Dad's knack for skeletal dismemberment.

Kirk says they're all getting together in July for the Knievel family reunion at Lovers



Leap Park. Everyone who comes wears a red-white-and-blue jump suit. Among the traction-and-cast photos in the Knieval family album are snaps of the family bone surgeon, and favorite paramedics they have known. Kirk wants to organize a Forest Service Fund Raiser Jump, over three bears and a couple of mooses. A crash will mean that the young Knieval gets mauled and stomped. A nice twist on the mangling tradition. It should bring in the local crowd in a big way.

vii.

We make camp on a green hill overlooking the valley as the dogs run off after a deer. JJ relaxes by taking apart a flashlight and re-assembling it, over and over again. I go to town around noon, pay the bond, and load up on beer and cigarettes. I had intended to quit in the placid, pristine setting of Montana, the babbling brook, the twittering birds, but my nerves are frazzled by the malfunctioning machinery. I feel like I'm covered in diaper rash. I need these death sticks in a bad way.

We move the planks down to a slough in the swamp that we must cross with a backhoe. After much grunting and swearing, we get them in place and gingerly drive the backhoe out onto the bridge. To slip off means a mired mess of massive magnitude. The hoe slips off, but only at the last minute, and JJ is able to claw his way out.

Elated by the triumph over a minor hurdle, we move the hoe into position, and dig the first hole. Sod, muck, more muck, clay, some sand, more clay, more sand—aha!—gravel. Gravel at four feet deep. JJ continues on down to 8.5 feet, where the boulders get too tough to pry out. The sun is setting and we are covered with a horde of blood-sucking flies, gnats, and mosquitoes. If frogs could fly, they'd be sucking our blood too. We quit for the day, pleased to be somewhat successful. We celebrate with beers.

viii.

We don't sleep in much. The grey hour before the sun is busy with getting the ice off and the kinks out. I get a knee-high mound of kindling together for the breakfast fire. Now how to light? Amid all our supplies littering the ground is a can of Coleman fuel. I generously pour on a third of the can. It takes some rummaging around in the tent to find a lighter. Wonder where those matches went?

Cautiously, I light a stick that I poke the soaked kindling with. A top stick weakly lights, flickers a little bit, clearly on the verge of going out. Well—this is some lame ass fuel. I reach into the center of the pile and flick my Bick. *TH-WHUMP!*

A five-foot fireball engulfs me, tossing my scorched body back amid a shower of burning kindling. In my periphery vision, I see JJ's surprised body eject straight off the ground like a missile. The sickening smell of my burned hair permeates the morning air.

"Bacon ready yet?" JJ queries nervously.

"Just making the coffee. Keep your drawers on," I reply.

ix.

The swamp is beautiful in the morning. Thirty acres of sapphire claims covered in

twenty-foot-high willow brush, swamp grass, beaver dams, and crystal-clear backwater ponds. A true wetland. It has taken three years to get the permits to dig three holes out here. A half mile upstream there are two operating sapphire mines, so I figured all the treasure of the mountains had to funnel through my claim.

The green of the morass is almost too much, just laying out there pumping out oxygen. A moose eyes us suspiciously from a nearby beaver pond, before returning to its munching. I feel like the bastard offspring of the Sierra Club and the Peabody Coal Company. Appreciating the nature, then raping it.

Now to work. JJ gives all the equipment a thorough 45-minute tinkering, while I haul sapphire sluicing and recovery equipment to Hole #1. JJ begins digging at Hole #2. He gets through the muck and into gravel quickly.

Soon I hear loud screaming and yelling. "Are you hurt?! Are you hurt?!" I yell as I run toward the scene. No, he's not hurt, but the backhoe is. By the time I get to him, the machine is shut down and JJ has climbed out onto the hoe-digging arm. He's all over it like a spider.

The main hydraulic cylinder has popped its top. The machine can dig no more. Five gallons of hydraulic fluid has instantly gooshed out into a Class A federally registered wetland. This is a mini-Exxon Valdez disaster. Spiderman is cussing and despairing, groping blindly at all the hose connections.

I am numb. Three hundred dollars was just spent to have the cylinders redone so that no accidents could happen. Mr. Jitters has been conned by the shifty-eyed machinist again. He manages to screw it back together, but it only works for two minutes before it pops again. Another two gallons slosh into the swampland, adding to the assault of the baby animals.

Next we move the hoe close to the truck, take out the cylinder, and weld the top back on. This carries the risk of igniting the interior fluid, and blasting the brave welder through the pearly gates.

Put back together now, and JJ still on the planet with us, so we are hopeful. Ten minutes later, *POW!* Same thing. Two more hydro-carbon gallons into the drink. Oughta call those people who wash the babies in gasoline. Get started on that.

It is clear we cannot fix it in the field. Now the beavers have justification to sneak up and slash our throats at night. The hoe is parked and dismantled. It is Friday afternoon. The repair shop is seventy miles away on Monday. The weekend's shot.

I finish what I was doing. After an hour of adjusting the sluice box, which included throwing myself down in the mud in a thrashing hissy fit, I finally get the proper angle. Together we wash up a cubic yard of material from Hole #1, JJ jittering the bucket feed while I work the rocks out of the wash.

Panning up the concentrate, at last I see little transparent colored pebbles. *Sapphires! Jesus Christ! Sapphires!* Not a hell of a lot, or any real huge ones, but sapphires none-the-less. Carefully putting the pan down, I grab JJ and dance a little jig on the spongy ground, whooping and hollering. *We did it. We got 'em now.*

The dog looks curiously into the pan and then laps at the water. *Arrggh! No! Bad dog.* Thirty acres of swamp water and he has to lap out of the pan. The first sapphires to see the light of day here since the Mesozoic Era millions of years ago, and they go down the dog's digestive tract.

Later back at camp, I weigh up the spoils. It works out to six carats per cubic yard of gravel, assuming the dog did not slurp up too many of the valuable pebbles. This is actually

piss-poor recovery, but not too bad for the top layer of gravel, being an indicator and all. There is also some gold dust sprinkled in.

x.

In the mist of the next morning, we survey the destruction. The ground of the swamp is all torn up from the backhoe's tires. It sits there cockeyed, partly dismantled, red oil surrounding it, and shimmering on beaver ponds as far as I can see. This looks ugly. Looks like loss of bond. *Oh shit—what to do?*

I have an idea. Soap cleans grease—right? A quick zip back and forth to the local village, more smokes, a case of beer, and two jumbo boxes of extra bright laundry detergent round out our supplies. Yeah—this will cut it, methinks, as I pour it into the slime-filled pit.

Hmmm . . . not much happening. Stir it with a shovel, Hell—add the other box, stir more. A bubbly froth works up. Damn, the oil under the bubbles still seems to be in good condition, still a nice layer on the pond. Stir some more. The froth is now four feet high, chunks are wisping away in the breeze.

Oh my God! Now what? We gotta get rid of this acre of bubbles. We go upstream and tear apart two beaver dams. The torrent sluices into our pit, foaming up the rest of the detergent, and carrying it out across the meadow to the trout stream. We flee to a wooded hilltop, hiding ourselves, but in view of the horror in the stream below. Mr. Jitters keeps glancing behind us, as if we were followed. A wall of bubbles and foam a half mile long flows down the valley like a great white slug. Some locals driving by on the road swerve in confusion as sedan-sized blobs of foam waft across their path.

xi.

A lethargic next morning, the foam of yesterday is all collapsed into a Love Canal toxic sludge of pink and grey. I drink a lot of coffee and rum, wallowing in the dirt like a dust bowl animal. JJ takes apart the Coleman lantern and plays “stretchy” with the rubber gaskets. In the afternoon, we explore the surrounding hills. We are blowing off the time allocated for sapphire mining, but what can we do? It is sad to be so ineffective, now that there is proof of sapphires on the claim.

We spend some of the day at the commercial dig-for-a-fee sapphire place just upstream. They sell little buckets of dirt at \$4 a whack. They'll screen it for you too, if you're a completely inept bystander.

I use my gold pan, sitting on the edge of their puddle with my feet in the water. No one can figure out what I'm doing, but they leave me alone. Yeah, plenty of sapphires in a little bucket. I find a tiny hot pink ruby. Nice. There are around 300 carats to the yard in this stuff. They mine it even further upstream, pick out the good stuff, and mix the reject back into mud for us tourists. The tourist thinks it's straight out of the hill.

Back at our own digs, we wash up and reclaim Hole #2, and then try to go a little deeper in Hole #1. The burial method works pretty well for the toxic slime. No wonder it's the preferred Mafia method.

The results from Hole #2 shows 7.5 carats to the cubic yard, and results from two feet

deeper on Hole #1 shows the same. The sapphire is very consistent and encouraging, although it is tiny, fractured, and generally crappy.

xii.

Monday morning we pull out for Missoula at 5 AM. The dogs prance about in the back of the pickup, their eyes squinted shut, their hair flattened by the 80 MPH wind. We're hoping to get a quick fix and be back in operation by noon. Sure. Right. Every machine shop in Missoula is booked to the max. The parts are not available.

We finally get someone to agree to work on our problem out on the edge of town. The grueling process takes all day. At closing time, the job is improperly done and runs the risk of popping again when back in the field. Another \$200 down the drain. We load up on auto parts for good measure. Back to the claims. In my rear view mirror, the dogs look like subjects in those acceleration tests at NASA.

Reassembly now. JJ also welds the hydraulic part, tempting the explosion gods again, but since we just spent two C-notes getting it re-threaded, why screw around? With only an hour of daylight left, I urge JJ to get digging. We finish digging Hole #2 before calling it a day. The patch-up job holds—but 2½ days have been lost.

The last day. We have to do whatever we can and pull out tomorrow. I must get back to the corporate paycheck for the security of the family program, maintain my contribution to the gross national product, and generally pay taxes for the preservation of the American Way. JJ digs at Hole #3. Our combination ecological cleansing methods seems to have done the trick, no foam or oil is evident. I think the beaver dam breeching has something to do with it. The gravel in Hole #3 is also close-packed bouldery material.

I wash up the spoils while JJ reclaims Hole #1. Hole #3 shows the best sapphire yet, 9.5 carats to the cubic yard. We clean up everything, reclaim all the holes, and get back across the bridge without incident. Soon we have all the equipment pulled out to the road. This is weird. Things are running really smooth now that we're leaving. Must be some old Indian curse at work here.

The drive home was back to normal for breakdowns. Spend three hours trying to get the trailer brakes working and repairing blowouts. Multiple stops all along the way for one damn dinky thing after another. At the 10,000 Silver Dollar Bar tourist trap, Mr. Jitters announces that the truck engine head is cracked in half. He is loudly playing with his pocket change in both pockets.

Basically I don't give a shit about the engine. As long as we keep moving, I could care less if we even have tires. Just pour in whatever it takes and let's keep going. Truck eats two cans of block sealant and three cans of octane booster. Another annoying \$42.37.

The sun dips below the horizon in a red-dusted fireball. I feel helpless in the face of this cosmic glory. Our caravan pulls into JJ's place in Idaho late in the evening, greeted by an eruption of barking and gnashing pit bulls. We are very burned out from miles of constant irritation.

I am not home like JJ is. I still have 600 miles to go to northern California, and to report for work thirty hours from now. No problem. Stomp the gas, grip the wheel. Twelve hours of race-car driving gives me eighteen hours of change to wash, eat, and sleep. Hell, even time for a breakdown if I want one.

xiii.

As the white line disappears under my left tire, hour after hour, I consider my squandered two-week vacation. In all, only about fifteen percent of it was spent in actual sapphire mining. I'm a little peeved about that.

But we did do what we set out to do. We did discover a sapphire deposit. I calculate in my mind (as only a mining engineer and Steven Hawking can) that we proved a volume of 5190 cubic yards, with an average of 7.12 carats per cubic yard. Of those carats, 205 were cuttable into gems. That works out to 7390 carats, worth a minimum cheap market value of \$17 per carat after treatment and cutting. The Shopping Channel's gonna love me.

The gross return, then, is about \$125,000 for the little area we molested. Extrapolating this to the full thirty acres shows a whopping \$46.9 million in gross recovery. If the acreage would be mined, it would be mined much deeper and the recovery would be more like 20 carats to the cubic yard, at a minimum. What the hell—they're getting 300 carats per cubic yard just upstream.

Thus the *real* value of the claim is more like \$420 million. Now—let's see—mine over five years at one million a year operating costs—chop up what's left to those involved— still leaves me with a cool five to six million bucks.

Hey now—*whoa!* I'm driving the wrong way. I'm worth \$6 million, but I'm going back to a nobody desk job in front of a computer video screen. I know Mr. Hawking is just itching to invest those book royalties but, instead, I'm going to where the bosses make jokes about my age and ask me to write memos. What's *wrong* with this picture?

xiv.

My father always said, "perseverance furthers." I hate that bullshit Protestant call to arms, but it may apply in this case. After twenty years in the treasure quest obsession business, I've finally discovered a moose pond worth doing something about. My aristocratic right is within the sights; no more the plebeian existence for me.

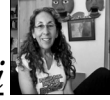
Now I have got to lay my plans carefully and shoot when the ducks are lined up in a row. In the meantime, I'll take the memo, my mind apart from these tiny pedestrian tasks before me. My thoughts are turning the big excavation over and over, wash plants, excavators, cats, cooks, Thailand heat-treaters, jewel cutters in sweatshops. Lucrative contracts made in side streets on the other side of the world with exotic Bangkok gem dealers.

My body is here, in this office, but my heart has me standing proudly on the hill, looking over thirty acres of a swirling, clanking, producing sapphire operation. The massive mine of my mind.

* * * * *



Judih Haggai



orange sunrise
slow ascent over ploughed fields
six-twenty bus ride

* * *

early rise
peek at headlines
total body fear

* * *

through chaos
a road of footsteps
choice after choice

* * *

room service
fresh towel please
insert under cat

* * *

dainty paws
dog poses proudly
on stolen blanket

* * *

in sight of front door
navigation through darkness
foot meets hedgehog

* * *

something to smile at
the cool tile floor
crickets in the dark

* * *

one group
then another
together wage peace

* * *

leaves of the fruit trees
rustle in swoops and surges
the morning winds

* * *

the sound of my name
a signal of this lifetime
earth embodiment

* * *

one more conference
not attended
green fields and bike

* * *

each time
a chance to start again
with more attention

* * * * *

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

[Commentary]

*"Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes."*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

What is the Tangled Gate?

***Note:** It's been four years I've been writing on the Tangled Gate myth in various forms
(Many Musics, Labyrinthine, Bags End News, Dream Raps).
Decided to spend several days re-reading it all, and see what I came up with.*

Once upon a time, there was a planet called Emandia. On this planet lived a nearly immortal race that created a high civilization that prospered for thousands of years.

But their planet began to suffer degradation. Its biosphere was flawed for some reason, & waned over time. It could not sustain this race.

Fortunately, there were those on Emandia who had foreseen this possibility. These individuals contrived an idea to find other habitable worlds, & plant beacons on these worlds, should a time of need come. These Gates would provide a safe landing place.

Here's where the story gets stranger. There was no technology in existence to build & transport these Gates to habitable planets. Emandians have very slight physical forms, & their world of wide seas & forested Islands had never been cleared for the building of cities like ours.

Best way to describe it is to say that they do not divide their lives as we do, into waking hours & dreaming ones.

So what they did was to cast out their query for someone who could build their Gates. And they met the Architect this way, a young man who was a powerful dreamer, studying architecture at University.

The Architect had been an unremarked young man until this contact in his dreams. But this changed him. The Emandians taught him how better to control, direct, & travel in his dreams; he, in turn, studied with a new & furied focus to become a master of architecture.

He contrives the Gate, what he calls the Tangled Gate, for the strange qualities its walled interior 'scape possesses, & builds it over many years in a series of dreams. The Emandians gift him the same near-immortality they have.



I don't know yet how they turned Gates built in dreams into physical objects. I tend to think they are a hybrid of waking & dream material. Like what is contained within their 'scapes is dream-world matter.

Emandia collapsed over millennia. Perhaps its sun collapsed. Perhaps this compromised its atmosphere. The process accelerated slowly enough for the worry to travel vaguely along the centuries. Then it accelerated more quickly, but still nobody acted.

When it was nearly too late, there was a convocation of leaders. Leaving this world was an anathema to them, but there seemed no choice. But how to do so? There were Gates on far worlds, but how to reach them?

Working again with the Architect, they build the Red Bag. This is a dream-portal from Emandia to the Gates. The catch was that whoever took this route would not be able to leave the perimeter of the Gate to live in the rest of their new world. They would sacrifice the physical part of themselves by this method.

So another method was also created. Space capsules were created & a kind of freeze-dried Emandian DNA was contrived for travel. If the capsule hit salty sea-water, it would activate this DNA, & an Emandian, two really, would emerge, rise to the surface, perhaps survive.

The assumption was that some of these worlds would fail to provide good homes, & the Emandians would use the Red Bag to transport to another. Perhaps the ones in the capsule would have better luck. It was all a gamble.

Another version of this says that the capsules contained Emandians chosen to assess a world beyond the confines of the Gate, & deem whether it was worthy for settling.

Another aspect of all this were the Creatures. They were native to the planets the Gates were sent to. Originally animals of an ordinary kind, the Gate's arrival on the Islands they lived on developed in them consciousness & sentience. And awareness of what Emandia & the Gate were. Creatures are very important to the Tangled Gate stories.

The Emandians failed on many worlds to find their new home, & would move on. The consequence of this on the planet was catastrophic. The closing of a Gate would annihilate a world's eco-system, destroying it.

One more important note about the Gate coming to a world. These worlds were chosen for how they resembled the forest Islands & wide seas of Emandia. What would happen to the particular Island where the Gate landed was that it would, like the Creatures, become conscious & aware. A being, a Beast, would emerge from it, a moving personification of the Island & all upon it. The Emandians would have some control of the Beast, but not all.

Stories of the Tangle Gate, Emandians, Beast, & so on would often circulate among the natives of the planet. Since Emandians would have caused their worlds to develop life such as men & women, & since Emandians lived among them, usually shaped like men & women as well (though in native form Emandians have no certain gender), mythologies would grow up of gods & goddesses from the skies. Sometimes individuals would try to find the Island, the Gate. Sometimes they would.

There is always more to discover about these strange stories.





Victor Vanek



Rally of the Damned

My Brothers! We are the losers.

A conjoined singularity, the collective of the lost souls who, having drank too much malt liquor the night before, stumbled on the train tracks close to home, to be found later dismembered and dew covered. Baptized into their new lives.

We will never be like the pipe smoke and sweet black coffee of our grandparents, as much as we try. Instead we are covered in the scent of our work, burning the insulation from electrical wires for that tiny bit of money it brings. We have the lingering flavor of hemlock and monkhood.

My Brothers! Let us gather together and mock the promise of balanced serotonin levels and symmetry of limbs.

Let us come together with our look of a creature from a children's fairy story, twisted in appearance from living under the wood-pile of imagination, wretched from wracking ourselves into the unnatural forms that we might supposedly please our beloved families.

Where others had of the cleansing light of a new morning, for us it was the harsh and blinding radiation of a solar god's judgment. Others had the swallowtails and cicadas, but we were left dead flies and dust trapped between the panes of glass of a window painted shut.

Our world with Bukowski as our High Priest, and Burroughs as our Prophet, we again open our eyes when the pains we suffer let us sleep no more.

Our world where we go hungry, not because of the endless bounty that surrounds us, but that we have no mouths.

My Brothers! Let us again gather together much like the wood louse and termite in the crumbling wood-pile of our lives.

We are like doves that, trusting their instincts, fly deliberately into glass.

We are like petrified driftwood that, while retaining its shape and recognizable form, cannot be used as fuel to warm others' lives on cold nights.

My Brothers! Let us gather together in the comely marriage of rot and darkness to celebrate the failing meat bodies we wear!

Let us join hands and sing our psalms, though we have no mouths. Let us come together and dance in our writhing awkward fashion.

Let us take comfort in the fact we not alone, unclothed in the Serengeti, any more.

Now we are alone and together.

Let us pray.

* * * * *





Reflections in the Mind's Eye

[Travel Journal]

Continued from Cenacle | 97 | October 2016

Once more we drove the cows away. Otherwise it was a quiet morning. Smiling her gorgeous grin, Joaquín's wife Maribel brought us six small, sweet bananas—the only food we'd eat that day.

Luis and Xiomara and Mecías came around and hung out for most of the afternoon. Luis carved a miniature canoe paddle for me out of balsa wood. I used a magic marker to write an alphabet for him and his sibs on the wood chips, and spelled some words in Spanish. David told them about the divine immortals from the books he reads on Taoism—they're like *wiñawai*, he says—and about the Jade Emperor, who's like *Ñañë*, God the creator.

Aguilar sauntered up, his arm still black and swollen in its sling. "Good morning."

"Morning," I said. "How're you feeling?"

"A little better. My hand still hurts a lot. But I read some of that Bible you gave me. Are you guys Christians?"

"We're Jews," Dave said.

"Ah, Jews." Aguilar nodded.

"What part of the Bible were you reading?" I asked him.

"Some Psalms and some Proverbs."

"Why need I fear when evil times come? Only my own sins can ensnare me," I quoted, translating the passage into Spanish with difficulty.

"What's that from?"

"Psalm 49. The psalms were supposedly written by King David, the guy his name comes from," I said, gesturing to Dave.

"King David, sure. The one who killed the giant. It's been too long since I read the Bible. It used to give me so much strength. Lately I've been lazy about reading it and sharing it with my kids. I've realized this bite is a punishment and a reminder."

"A reminder?" Dave echoed.

"Yeah. I made a deal with Jesus. I dedicated my life to him, and he washed away my sins. I need to remember that."

"Your interpretation," I said, "of why you got bitten is interesting to me—last night it seemed I saw a demon feeding on you through the snakebite."

"No. I think God Himself sent the snake to bite me."

"Ever tried *yagé*?" Dave asks.

"Yeah, one time, a bunch of years ago. I'd been in a stupid and destructive period in my life. I was drinking too much, chasing women, staying out all night at parties. After the healer gave me *yagé*, I felt I went to Hell. I saw devils flying around torturing the souls of the

damned.”

“What did the devils look like?” I wanted to know.

“Like devils!” Aguilar said.

“Red, with bat wings?”

“Of course. And I realized I was gonna end up there if I didn’t change my life. Completely! Immediately! At that moment I prayed to Jesus and asked him to wash away my sins. Later that night I went up to Heaven. I saw Jesus. The next day I restarted my life. I met my companion a little while after, and married her, and we’ve been together ever since.”

The buzz of a motor canoe on the river intensified, then stopped. Aguilar’s father strolled up the path, light on his feet, white-haired, slender, dark-skinned. His son feeling good enough to go home, the two men left.

Dave took off his crown, lay down on a foam mat, closed his eyes. Soon he was breathing deeply and regularly.

I lay in my hammock, eyeing my broad, squarish feet: the pale, smooth skin; the sparse brown hair; the short toes Deirdre insisted looked like squid tentacles. I remembered Deirdre telling me she sometimes felt her own toenails were watching her, like eyes.

I pondered the snakebite mystery. Maybe the bite just happened because the snake perceived Aguilar as invading its personal space. Snakes usually respect human space because we’re strong in it, and it doesn’t benefit them to invade. Plus, they don’t want to waste their venom.

At dusk, the local incarnation of Buddha-energy came over and sang a lilting song over a cup of yagé for each of the three of us, beginning with himself.

Paihuhu ke yuuri.

Matemo pai ke yuuri.

Hey,

Ey-ey,

Ey-ey . . .

Then he wrapped himself in a blanket against the chill, curled up in a hammock, and fell asleep.

I lay down on a mat on the floor, wrapped a blanket around myself, laid my head on my folded sweater—a black one Deirdre had given me for Christmas—and slipped into a tidal wave of unconsciousness.

I’m smashed by tremendous force. I’m in the severest agony. Time has stopped. The moment explodes into a punishment of infinite pain that lasts forever and ever and ever. No movement, no thought, only pain.

At the far side of forever I wake in the dark in a new world of pain. The only difference is, time's running. And I remember where I am. But I'm on fire inside.

*Whole body burning.
Can't move. Can't think.
Can barely moan.
In a word, dying.*

In his hammock, Dave clears his throat and sings:

*Every rainbow has a skull for a head.
That's what I saw when I woke up dead . . .*

Like anything else that might've happened at that moment, his singing makes the pain worse. I want Dave or Joaquín to save me from this hell, not sing. Every cell in my body's screaming.

At last I manage to struggle to my feet. I throw back my head and bellow in Spanish: "¡¡¡GOD!!! ¿YOU WANT TO KILL ME? ¡¡THEN KILL ME NOW!! ¡I'M READY! ¡LOOK ME IN THE EYE AND KILL ME!"

*Seething with energy,

silent,

I'm within

death,

a dark antechamber of wind.

I peer around.

I contemplate it.

I pull out of it,

alive.*

My mind floods with thoughts about death. Death's a change of scene. Another puberty, an initiation, a maturation. And when we die, we leave our old ways behind and go exist in a more advanced way.

And I'd gladly die to save the life of any of Rufino's kids in the hut next door.

And the old die to free up energy on Earth for the young.

And Dave's relatives who died in concentration camps watch him from the sky to

which they rose as smoke.

They look just like stars.

The stars of David.

Dave sits up in his hammock in a cloud of stars. I speak to him about the infinite pain I felt. He nods. I say I poked my head into the Realm of Death. He nods and begins to speak the things on his mind. I can't focus on what he's saying. My inner noise is too loud. And the stars are too bright.

*But slowly, ever so
slowly, in my infinite
wisdom, it enters my thick
rainbow-tailed skull
that Dave was also experiencing
difficulty at the same time I was.
I realize this
after he tells me so
three times.
For him it was
two anacondas made of fire
squirming and
lashing out inside him,
burning his brain
and guts
to ash.*

Now, though, we both feel fine.

So we climb down off the hut, and stand on the grass, and stretch, and talk.

Me: “. . . and this old Kabbalistic theory I was reading about last year said there's reincarnation among Jews—it doesn't say anything about other people—this was just talking about Jews—and it said all the Jews who are alive today were at Mount Sinai when Moses brought down the tablets of the law: it's all the same people, but it's not direct reincarnation—like one person *then* equals one person *now*—but like there's *bits of each of them* in each of us, like a bit of Samson in my elbow and a bit of Adam in my chin—that's like how DNA works, anyway, but on the level of soul, which is connected to the material—but also, I get this flash of you being King David and me being the prophet Nathan, who was this prophet King David hired to tell him what was up with God—and it feels like we had this exact same conversation in the desert, three thousand years ago . . .”

Dave: “. . . and wondered if we'd have it again in the future, and the answer was, yeah, of course, absolutely, and also, we'll have it again in some *far-flung* future in some *far-out* galaxy whilst smoking a spliff on a newly-discovered rainforest planet and, like now, we'll recognize that we're *ancient people reincarnated in modern times* to manifest the true and proper religion of world peace and brotherhood and respect that all people know intuitively but can't usually make happen in their daily lives because they're *infected* with the *diseases* of modern society, like ignorance and greed and gluttony, so in this life we need to *open our eyes* and be *absolutely righteous*, keeping ourselves clean from the temptations of materialism

and consumerism, following the examples of the highest, purest divine immortals, and the challenge for us is to *remember that*, to *hold tight* to that truth, to *learn* the ancient traditions, and *never let them fade away!*”

Away, way, way, way! His voice echoes in my ears.

Pausing, we echo ourselves, in the ringing silence of the shadow of language, eternal like mountains and clouds, and, like them, drifting.

When the nausea finally comes, it's gentle. In the spirit of the gleaming machines of the Café Trieste, I intone:

*We make cappuccino for the grass,
we make espresso for the earth,*

*in a way high way, in a way high way,
a-way, a-way, a-way, a-way, a-way.*

The yagé's even sweet as it gurgles up, and frothy like steamed milk.

After spitting out the last of his, Dave says, “Don Ignacio told me Quichua shamans sometimes re-drink the ayahuasca they vomit up! They puke into gourds, then drink it back down!”

“Sure. It's pure,” I say. “When you fast, you get clean inside. And there didn't seem to be any stomach acid in that dose I just threw up.”

Dave nods. “The stomach doesn't digest it, just passes it on to the intestines.”

The clouds have parted to reveal a huge, yellowy-golden crescent moon, parallel to the ground, a hand's width above the trees, its horns pointed up, the very image of a Sumerian cow goddess. I send her my love.

“I feel like sending a fax,” Dave says.

“A fax?” I echo.

“A fax to Fujimori.”

“Explain?”

“Alberto Fujimori, the Japanese Peruvian dictator-president of Peru. He ordered the invasion of Ecuador's jungle territory south of here eight months ago.”

“I know who he is. The press says he's like a modern samurai. How you gonna send him a fax at this time of night in the middle of the jungle?”

“By takin' a crap. That's what people say here in the Oriente, the Ecuadorian Amazon. Fax paper's like toilet paper, right? Both come in rolls. So when you crap, you send a fax to Fujimori.”

“Ah! Tell him I say ‘Peace.’”

“Will do, Old Shoe.”

King Dave zigzags off across the grass.

I climb into the network of my hammock and pray for peace.

A blue nine-pointed star appears before my eyes etched in crisp neon lines in the air. It vanishes.

I want a tattoo of it on my shoulder. And maybe I'll shave my head and have six eyes from different animal species tattooed on my scalp, in honor of the hunting spider from yesterday afternoon. That'd be nice for ceremonies. But expensive and impractical. My hair



would grow over it. Only really useful if one day I get put in a prison camp where they shave everyone's head. There, though, I could potentially freak out the authorities with it. And maybe even process information the eyes took in.

What are the chances I'm going to end up in a prison camp, anyway?

Am I going to die under torture in a prison camp? Is this a premonition?

Every time we think about death, it's a premonition. We perceive it moving toward us. It emits waves, it has prepercussions. We experience these as pain and fear. But that's OK. I know death now. I'm not afraid.

*And again,
the thought of death again:*

but no longer so heavy:

*light, like a black
feather
one carries
tied in one's hair
to move in the breeze.*

*The breeze ruffles the surface
of a pool of frosty light in my mind.
I shiver.
From the chill in the center,
cold thoughts congeal into
silver marigolds
that amuse the panther sky
curled up under the roof
trying not to smile.
The panther is a cloud of oak leaves
from which drip oscillating feathers
that sob
in rippling laughter.*

Dave's back.

"Nate," he murmurs, grinning, strolling up to the edge of the hut. "I was shitting in fluent Japanese! I warned Fujimori not to invade Ecuador again, and I prayed for peace."

"That musta been very enjoyable for you." I slowly stand up from the hammock, stretch, climb down to the ground, lean against the edge of the floor.

"It was. You know, Fujimori's got a daughter. Did I tell you this already? Last time I was in Lima, she was tryin' to get me to marry her! I met her at this party. It was really hard to shake her off."

"Too bad for you," I say. "Japanese women are hot."

"Don Joaquín says the women of the sky people are so beautiful that, when you meet

them, you lose your desire for human women.”

“I can imagine that’d be true if they look like Japanese women.”

“*Cielojaponesas*,” Dave muses. “Japanese women of the sky. I can almost see them now.”

“I had a Japanese girlfriend in my boarding school,” I tell him. “Up there, nobody had any condoms, so it was all about oral sex, in secret, on the sly. We used to break into cabins in the woods and sixty-nine on the beds.”

“Uh-huh.”

“I read an article on the plane as I was comin’ here that said that in the embryo, this one organ develops into either a penis or a clitoris. So when you go down on her, you have a homosexual relationship with a woman—‘cause we’re all basically the same sex anyway!”

There’s an awkward pause.

Dave breaks the silence, murmuring, “I have to be by myself now.” He strides away in a curving path, leaving me leaning against the edge of the floor, thinking, *Damn, why did I say that? He must think I’m a total pervert. He’s always going to remember me as that dude who has gay sex with Japanese girls. I’ve got to remember I’m not in a boarding school for the arts anymore, not in a violin major’s dorm room with a David Bowie poster on the wall. The problem with me is, my mind’s full of thoughts. And they jump out of my mouth like fish. It’s the storyteller’s fate. Live by the word, die by the word. Nothing I can do but let the moment flow down the river of time. Let it be carried away with all the other stupid things I’ve ever said and done.*

That reminds me of a time I sat down in a Chinese restaurant with a Mexican friend, and I had something to say to him, and then it was gone. It was as if the thought had been a fish, and an osprey had swooped down and snatched it right out of my head to eat. Thoughts, memories, moments of time, events—all fish hunted by the ospreys of oblivion. Some fish swim away, some stick around. We can consciously re-call them. Sometimes they don’t come, because they don’t want to, or they’re dead, or too far down the river.

The river. I should haul some water to wash the floor of the hut in the morning.

At the trees, I pick up a four-gallon aluminum pot by its C-shaped handle and, barefoot, in the dark, work my way down the slippery bank.

Animism. Everything’s a being, even thoughts, memories, moments of time, and the smooth, soft mud letting me walk upon it without making me fall. Dear mud, I bless you with my feet.

Words, too, are beings, evolving across time and space. They want to be used, spoken, expressed, instantiated, given birth to, reproduced.

I reach the river’s edge and squat in the sand and listen to the water pronouncing its long, long word.

My mind somersaults into a darkness of liquid sound.

Doesn’t *everyone* struggle with their sexuality, whatever it is?

We’re Jacob wrestling with the angel! This is our holy war!

Abhhh...

These thoughts

I’m having now,

they’re so fine.

I won’t remember them later on,

but that’s all right.

Catch and release. As with fish. If I had a pen and paper now, I'd write all this down. But a light would spoil the trance. Better to let the mind move like water, rippling invisibly. I release my thoughts, aiming them into a kind of orbit so they might come back someday when I have a pen. Their splayed silver tail fins vanish in the inky sky. I'll recognize them if they come back to me, though they may have changed. And if they don't return to me, they'll go to someone else. Such thoughts have had themselves had by many.

I dip the pot deep in the water and haul it up and out, pour off the excess, walk it back up toward the hut, socializing with the mud with my feet, letting the weight of the pot steady me. *Dear God, I wish to mention to you the wondrous kindness of this mud.*

At Cabaña Supernatura, I realize I've forgotten everything since I headed up from the river. The thoughts were coming too fast for me to fix them. I know this has happened many times before. What good is a thought if you can't remember it? Does it leave a trace? A scale? A fishy smell?

Joaquín's awake, sitting up in his hammock, talking with Dave. Dave hands him back the empty cup. Dave rinses his mouth, spits into a crack between the floorboards. I tread slowly up the steps and set the pot down. I dip a plastic bowl into it and wash the mud off my feet, then sit in my hammock.

¿Contento?" Joaquín asks me. ["Happy?"]

"Sí." ["Yes."]

¿Quiere tomar otro?" ["Want to take another?"]

"Sí." ["Yes."]

He pours and sings. Under his voice, micro-demons flow like particles of dust off the cup until the yagé is pure. Then he hands it to me, lies back in his hammock, wraps himself in his blanket.

Over the cup, I sing: *One love is high, one love is high, one love is high.* Hundreds of small, perfect orange flames appear over the liquid's surface, spiraling clockwise toward the center. I watch them as I sing; each one's curved and recurved, wavy like the blade of a kris.

But as beautiful as they are, they're flames, and they might set me on fire inside again.

The moment I think that, they become petals, and an orange flower floats atop the brew, spiraling, the color of the evening sun on the horizon.

I drink the power, set the cup on the floor, rinse my mouth, spit the water in a crack between floorboards.

A light snore: our teacher's crossed into dreams. "Nate, let's pray for Joaquín," Dave says. We chant rhythmic syllables. A cumulus of healing energy condenses above us. I invite spirit doctors from Heaven to treat any nascent illnesses Joaquín might have. Two doll-sized men in brown robes float down through the cloud—Saints Peter and Paul making a house call. They vanish inside the drinker's body.

After a time, the work feels done. We grow silent, attentive. The saints float back to the sky. The cloud dissolves. I observe Joaquín's sleeping form, wonder what he's dreaming.

Since our first ceremony, I've felt he and I are one man in two bodies. He's the older Secoya me, I'm the younger gringo him. Now I'm the he who's awake and he's the I who's dreaming. Do I watch the dark world with eyes he sees through? Is the black-green of our eyes flinty enough to slice the skin of this night?

Swirling, the still birds echo, calling the dawn.

A rooster crows once, twice. The air trembles with insect song. Dave laughs, and sings,

Hey, hey, hey, hey . . .

I lie face-down in my hammock as if in a net. My soul's a dolphin that surfaces to breathe. Those quick surfacings are my lives on the material plane. I'm a weredolphin aswim in the myth of the world. Just need a stingray for a hat to hide my blowhole.

While, wavelike, reticulated like a python, the universe slithers into undreamed-of futures.

Those who haven't seen as we have seen have seen nothing.

And yet, everyone has seen everything. We're just the ones who remember.

An old classroom with squeaky wooden floors and scarred wooden desks materializes in my memory. The professor's discussing one of the earliest Hindu philosophers. "So what he's saying is, is that there's only *one being* in the universe, and it incarnates across time and space in every single organism that has ever existed and will ever exist."

The little nine-pointed blue star appears again, a sign, a messenger, a blessing. I observe it, admire it. It's for me. I sit up, refreshed.

Joaquín's still sleeping. Dave remarks, "Nate, did you know the Waoranis and Secoyas used to be enemies?"

"No."

"The Secoyas were scared of the Waoranis 'cause the Waoranis were *crazy warriors*. And the Waoranis were scared of the Secoyas 'cause the Secoyas were powerful magicians!"

"That makes sense." I nod.

"The two tribes also have a totally different attitude about sex. Secoyas don't even kiss each other. But Waoranis are all into sex. A lot of Waorani guys want to marry Quichua women because Waorani women consider it their right to fuck any guy they want when their husband isn't around!"

"I got that impression." I remember Ayamo, and the look she gave me, inviting me, challenging me, to make love to her.

"Here's somethin' else," Dave goes on. "If you want to count to ten in Waorani, you say:

aruki

mea

mea go aruki

mea go mea

emempuki

emempuki go aruki

emempuki go mea

emempuki go mea go aruki

emempuki go mea go mea

tum pepuki.

"Get it? It's like saying 'one, two, two plus one, two plus two, five, five plus one, five plus two, five plus two plus two, ten.' But these days, Waoranis usually use Spanish for numbers instead."

"Right on. The Spanish system's more convenient. Any more Waorani trivia?"

"Sure. When a Waorani farts, he says, '*Durani koma*.' That means 'Ancestor fart,' which is short for 'As my ancestors farted, I fart.' They crack up when they say it. But it's deep. Think about it."

"Cool. What my ancestors did, I do. I'm them, alive again. It's true."

"Speakin' of ancient smells," Dave says, "do you smell that?"

"No, what?"

"That tree over there."

"No. What's with it?"

"It's a cannonball tree. Can you smell it?"

"Now that you mention it, there's a kind of musk, now that the breeze is comin' from over there." It was like the ball-sweat of a ghost.

"Right," Dave says. "The tree's name in Quichua is *aya uma*. Soul skull. It has these armored, cannonball-sized fruit that sometimes fall from twenty-five feet up! If you're standing underneath, they can kill you! Most trees in the forest have shallow, broad root systems. But the *aya uma*'s got a taproot like a *long, strong* spike *deep* in the ground, so it's nearly impossible for it to blow over in a storm! That's why Rufino didn't cut it down when he built this hut. Don Ignacio told me the Quichuas say that if you want to be strong like the tree, you can run up to it and *punch* it in the trunk as hard as you can, then *run away* as fast as you can! You'll get really strong, unless you trip and fall while you're running away. If you do that, you'll die soon."

"You know what'd be cool?" I ask, changing the subject.

"What?"

"If we could continue this exact same conversation another year, in another yagé ceremony."

"Right on, bro!"

"I'm planning to come back here next year."

"Me too," Dave says. "Don Joaquín said I could take some of this yagé up to the States with me. I'm thinking I'll host some ceremonies in California and raise some money for a community project here."

"Far out! Go for it! I'm just gonna go home and work. But I think I can get back."

The thought of travel moves me. I go out and stroll on the grass. I don't punch the cannonball tree, just sing *One love is high*. I dance, and information floats down to me from the sky. *The Germans*, I murmur. *The Germans and the Jews*. Nazis were possessed by a spirit of destruction. They consumed people: took money and property from them, took their lives, shared their flesh out between the earth and sky.

Maybe God wanted the victims near him. They were low in vitality but high in holiness. The world's always dealt harshly with those who lack whatever it is that lets us survive—the penalty being, of course, death.

So the Jews got to go to Heaven and the Nazis got their stuff. That's cosmic justice, that's the karmic equation that's invisible to materialists. Everybody lost and everybody won. The Nazis were defeated when the forces of preservation of life allied against them. The gods of death raged for a while, then the gods of life took their turn. Now Wiesenthalic angels hunt Nazi ghosts in the Argentinas of the beyond, and the Jewish victims live a step closer to God in celestial Zions from whose wells and fountains they can watch over their family in this world.

Back at the hut, Joaquín's awake. Dave and I ask him for healings.

Dave lies face-down on the floor beside Joaquín's hammock. The old man lights a Full Speed. He blows its smoke over the mamecócó, then sings, and whisks Dave's energy field clean.

Each sound is beautiful. But the procedure takes a long, long time. I get impatient and

jealous: Joaquín likes him better than me! I encourage myself to relax and/or shut up.

"Hn-hn," Joaquín finally says, stopping. "Ya."

"*Que lindo*," Dave murmurs, How beautiful. There's a pause.

"I saw a hummingbird," he continues. "It said . . ."

There's a long, long pause filled with the crystalline ringing of crickets.

A rooster crows. Morning's coming. I hear Joaquín breathing softly.

"*Mi'pë*," Dave finishes. "What does that mean?"

"Hn-hn," responds Joaquín after a moment, distractedly.

"The hummingbird said it," Dave reminds him. "*Mi'pë*."

Another long crickety pause. I put my hand on the floor, nearly stopping the movement of my hammock, then give the floor a shove and fold my arms across my chest.

"People," murmurs Joaquín finally. "It's one of their words. It means 'people.'"

"*Deóhi*," Dave thanks him, and stands up slowly, and walks back to his hammock, whistling under his breath.

"Toanké?" Joaquín says. I rise, approach, get down, and stretch out on the floor, face down. The song begins, and the soothing, energetic flight of the mamecocó over my back.

My father used to say a Jewish blessing with his hands on my head when I was a child. A *bracha*. It was odd. Embarrassing. But I let him do it because it mattered to him. Now I see the brachas have kept me safe by installing patterns of caution inside me and waves of safety around me. In my memory, I'm seeing the bracha from my dad's perspective, not mine—looking down his arms at his hands resting atop my head. *Blessed art Thou, Oh Lord, our God, King of the Universe . . .*

One day last year, the father of my old friend Murray came into the Café Trieste and told me about a recent, excellent mushroom trip he'd taken with his friends. "The famous realization from that day was when one of my friends runs up to me, and grabs my arms, and goes, 'Now I get it! I *am* my father!'"

Another inlakesh. It made sense to me then, and it makes sense to me now, as I represent my lineage in accepting a blessing from a different father and his lineage. We're all distant cousins anyway. According to the Hindu philosopher, we're even all the same person.

Joaquín's blessing is clearing away smog above me, opening a space for an invisible light that shines down from above. *Blessed art Thou, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe, creator of invisible light. Builder of the trees from which Jesus and Odin hung, and the trees for which Humbaba died.*

These thoughts hang in the air like my father's sculptures, allowing themselves to be observed from many directions. I think I see a flaw in one of them. If blessing leads to survival, were children who die young not blessed enough? No, it's not that. Their souls must be needed in the next world. They hit death puberty earlier than average. They keep evolving on the other side. By the time we die, their palaces will be built.

I recall what I've seen in these nights, guard it from the ospreys of oblivion. The bats, the flames on the cup, the nine-pointed blue stars. The Japanese women of the sky. The eyes in the sky, the eyes on Dave's crown. How accurately will I remember? I feel like most of what was noteworthy is clear in my mind.

"Hn-hn," murmurs Joaquín with a final flick of the mamecocó. "Go lie down now."

"*Deóhi*," I say, and stand up slowly and keep my head down to avoid the dizziness that could knock me back to the floor. There's a deep blue glow under the leafy fringe of the palm

frond roof: dawn's coming. I wrap myself in my blanket and lie down, rocking from side to side. Wriggle to crack my back, observe the sensation of breathing, and relax. Not sleepy. Alert and curious for what'll happen next.

Dawn comes. Rufino's three cows do too. Our patience tested again, Dave and I chase them away.

Fog makes a silky void of the river, swallowing the trees on the other side. All is cool, calm, and gray.

After dawn, Dave went out to fax another message of peace to the Peruvian president. He came back exclaiming, "Nate! Check this out! This is friggin' nuts! I found these super-weird fresh tracks on one of the trails!" He brought me out and showed me. I could see what he meant. It looked as if something with one cloven hoof and one human foot with the big toe pointed straight down had taken exactly six steps on the trail toward the hut. "Don Ignacio told me about this!" Dave said. "It's exactly how he described this *wicked crazy forest spirit* called the *chewya chaki*! Holy shit! Joaquín's got to see this!"

But when we told our hosts about the *chewya chaki* tracks, neither Joaquín nor any of the others wanted to go out and look. They weren't curious and didn't care. So what if a forest spirit came near during the night while people were drinking yagé? This is news?

Later in the morning, Joaquín and his family motor canoed downriver to Siecoya, leaving Dave and me in charge of the place. We started packing, because we were going to catch a canoe upriver at 4:30 the following morning. I ran across a letter Deirdre had written me. I reread it and cried for all the love that'd gotten lost between us, and then between everyone—all the attempts to love that fail. I thought of Yumiko, of Jennifer, of Eunmi, of Lily, of the blonde girl with the flute. I thought of my parents' wedding rings and wondered again what'd become of them. I wept harder. *I didn't want to do any of this*, I sobbed. *I'd rather my parents' marriage had worked out. I'd have a younger brother or sister or two. I'd be in Ann Arbor now living a totally different life as a man of the town, mainstream, stolid. Instead, I'm this edgy, tragic guy—*

"Hey, bro," Dave broke in. "Could you please stop crying now? Kids live here, and that kind of energy isn't good for them."

"Don Joaquín says it's good to cry when we drink yagé," I countered, stopping crying anyway. "It gets all the negative stuff out."

"Wouldn't you rather go swimming?" he said. "Let's get our suits on and go check out that rope swing over the river."

We went to the riverbank. This was the first time I'd hung by my legs from the rope swing and dropped into the water. Watching other people had taught me, and the yagé improved my balance. Dave and I took the vitalizing plunge again and again, only stopping when he started to feel nauseated.

In the late afternoon sunshine, Dave discovered a tiny lizard, half the length of an index finger, on a sheet hanging on a line. On its body were green, yellow, and brown stripes, while its tail had a white ring at the base, then a black ring, then another white ring, and then a black tip. The tail flicked back and forth and curled and uncurled, following some inscrutable lizard impulses. A final riddle: who painted the lizard's tail?

* * * * *



Joe Coleman

Coffee With No Goodbye

Often we stirred our thoughts there
drank lots of coffee
poured ourselves out
spilled feelings
filled each other's
cups to the brim there
conversing sweet and light
often
percolating
sipping slowly
for so long.

We savored our fine blend there
so many times
until that one day
that one certain strange cup of coffee.

That strange cup seemed too hot
too bitter
too dark.
It tasted like a burning bridge.

I might have given it time to cool
but I obey my clock without pity.
So I went outside "for a cigar"
and left you sitting alone
coffee barely touched
bridge burned
ashes on my tongue.

* * *

Non-Invasive

If this were a lancet
scalpel
or knife,
I'd slice through meat and bone
to the heart of the matter,
exposing pains.

This is a pen in my hand.
It slides on the surface
of things best left alone.
Feelings don't splatter.
There are no stains.

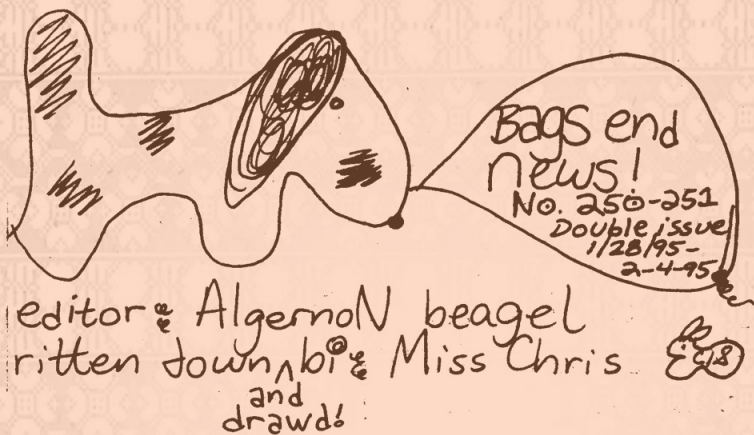
Take the pen to paper sheet,
ink will make the chaos neat.
Ink is slower to congeal.
It is safer to think.
It hurts to feel.

* * *

Horatio at the Mulvian Dance

Bravely
he endured
a lifetime of
inconsequential catastrophes,
negligible calamities,
and trivial disasters,
until that broken shoelace
done him in.

* * * * *



A Illistratid Meeting with Sheila Bunyo

Miss Chris is writing this
down lik I promised her becauz
Princes Crissy did it last week.
An its gona have pikturs becauz
Mis Chris is a artist an sed so
nicly. An its gona be a dubble
issue becaus of havng so many
pikturs.



Bags End Book #6: The Grand Scheme of Liberation!, Part 2

Part 1 of this story and more Bags End writings
can be found at: www.scriptorpress.com/bags-end.pdf

Hello Cenacle readers,

Mah name is Algernon Beagle & I am the editor guy for Bags End News. Bags End News is a newspaper about mah homeland, a fantasyland called Bags End.

From the outside, Bags End looks like 3 brown-colored laundry bags piled up on a little chair in the corner of our friend Miss Chris's bedroom in Connecticut. Miss Chris is 5 years old & has a toy tall boy brother named Ramie, who is 17.

Inside, Bags End is sort of like an apartment building of levels but, cuz it is a fantasyland, nobody knows about its top or bottom. Most levels look like regular hallways, with doors to rooms & other places running up & down their lengths.

Each level is connected to the one above & the one below by ramps that are good for folks with legs & others without. Strangely, the other end of each level ends in a sudden edge, so be warned, should you come to visit.

The Cenacle editor guy, who is a cousin to my friend & Miss Chris's brother Ramie, invited me to share some of the stories from mah newspaper, now & again. He also helped with the typing & some of the spellings, to make this book presentable here. I love English but I still don't spell it too great.

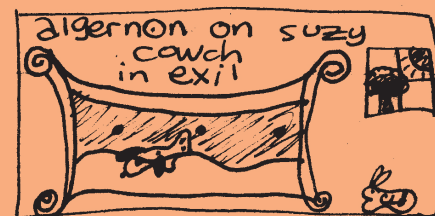
Anyway, I hope you enjoy these stories from Bags End, a place near & dear to mah heartbone.

A Illustrated Meeting with Sheila Bunny!

Miss Chris is writing this down like I promised her because Princess Crissy did it last time. An its gona have pikturs becauz Mis Chris is a artist an sed so nicly.

The first piktur is of your old pal Algernon resting on Suzy Cowch. I was wating theer lik Miss Chris askd me too. She an Princess Crissy had gon too ask Sheila kwestions about Farmer Jones and Betsy Buny Pillow and the Bunny Pillow Free State.

When she came in her face was strang.



"Hello" I said.

Miss Chris didn't say nothing and then I saw why she was strang. Sheila Bunny was with her.

Miss Chris gav me a hug too small an sat next too me. Sheila looked down on me from the floor below.

"Hello beegel" she said.

My fear got the best of me an I yelled "You can't smote me! I am in exil!"

"I haven't come to smote you. I have come to talk." she said an she hoppd up to Miss Chriss' lap. So much for me having her all too myself.



I like this pikchure OK EXCEPT Sheila didn't have her crown on. Mis Chris sez she drewd it becauz she likes it.

"Why are you doing this for Betsy? She never liked you. She never treated you well!" Sheila said.

"Becauz she is King or something of the Bunny Pillow Free State and she is not happy!" I sayd.

Sheila lookd at me hard with her perple eyes and even tho I was still scared I lookd back at her with all my bravnes in my eyes.

"You won't give up, will you?" she asked.

I shook my head. I peekd a look at Miss Chris and I saw she was looking at me proudly. O shuks.

Sheila hopped off Miss Chris's lap and onto the floor.

"OK. We'll do it. I hope you're right, beegel" she said and then she hoppd away too Miss Chris's bedroom and back to BAGS END.

And that was that.

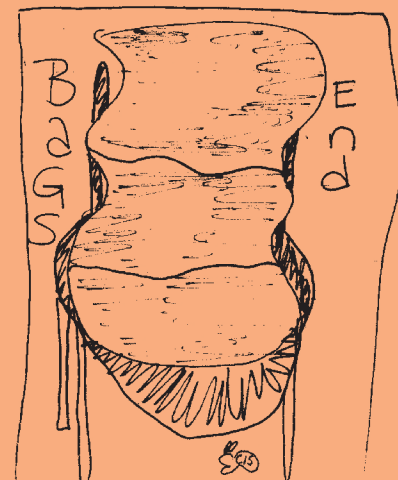
I was so surprised that Sheila sayd yes that I forgot to be happy until Miss Chris was happy and hugged me and everything.

"YOU won, AWAWA!" she sayd.

So I was hapy with her for a minit but then I stopped and lookd at her in her pretty eyes. "Mommy, I didn't win because it's not about me at awl. It's abowt Betsy and she is still far away and sad."

Well, Miss Chris looked at me proud some more and my humblness couldn't take it so I looked away from her proud look an told her that we shoold go to BAGS END right away an see Sheila and get Crissy too and have a plan. So that's what we did.

This is a pikture of BAGS END sitting on its little chair in the corner of Miss Chris's



bedroom. But my loyal readers no that it doesn't look like that at all inside.

When we were back in BAGS END the first person I told Miss Chris I wanted to see was my friend LORI Bunny WHO is also my newspaper's only staf.

We found her in the bedroom she shars with Sheila. She was looking at her encyclopedia but her look was very sad. Then she saw Miss Chris and me.

"ALGERNON!" she yelled all happy.

"LORI!" sayd me and we hugged each other.

Then she looked reelly seryous. "Ar you still exild?"

I shook my furry head. "No" I sayd.

Then Miss Chris sayd "Lory, I am drawing Algernon's newspaper this time but would you write down the rest of it?"

Lory ajusted her cute funy little spektekles an smild a big smil and she noddod yes. Then I nowd what her smile ment.

This is a picture of Lori Bunny & since she is writing this, it means that all is right with mah newspaper & Miss Chris is drawing pictures in it!

Now it was time to go & see Sheila about Betsy. So me & Miss Chris & Lori all went to Sheila's Throne Room. I expected to find Sheila slouched down in her Throne there. Nope.

Princess Crissy was slouched down in Sheila's Throne! She was reading a Bump comic book, probably from mah silly brother Alex, & there was a R.E.M. record on Sheila's record player.

Miss Chris got all funny now. "Presenting to Her Royal Highness Princess Chrisakah, back from his exile in Connecticut & other 4n places, Algernon Beagle!"

Then she pointed to me like I was supposed to do a funny trick or something. All I did was crawl into Crissy's lap & she skritchd mah chin very well.

"Out, out, dum beagle!" said a suddenly-here Sheila Bunny, hopping into the room.

Briefly & stupidly brave, I looked at her from the safety of Crissy's lap in the danger of Sheila's Throne, & said, "A little late, aren't we?"

Well, Crissy lifted me up & tossed me to Miss Chris, who caught me & hugged me just be4ore Sheila hopped through the air to Crissy's lap to evict me from her place. Crissy caught Sheila & hugged her close. Miss Chris sat down on the floor cross-legged & helded me nicely. Lori watched all this with her smart eyes & little smile, & she adjusted her spectacles a bit.

Sheila looked at me in her usual grumpy way. "All this trouble 4or a dum Pillow," she muttered.

"Sheila, don't you like Betsy at all?" asked Miss Chris while she skritchd mah 4orehead good.

Sheila was quiet a minute, like she was thinking hard. Then she looked up at the ceiling with her purple eyes, & I knowed she was thinking.

"All this time that dum Pillow wants to do one thing. Defeat Jones! Defeat Jones! Liberate the Pillows! Bunny Pillow Free State!" Sheila grumbled.

"And now she's not happy? Now she's got her dream & it's not perfect?" Sheila was getting madder & madder until Crissy had to hug & kiss her, & skritch her back to quiet.

Well, I was getting tired of this. Sheila could grouch 4or a long time if she wanted to.

"So what do we do? Do we go to see Betsy, or do we try & find Farmer Jones?" I asked. Getting down to business, that's me.





"Bump! Bump! Bump!" was the yell &, before you could pull the Crazy Kin Alarm, or bemoan your family roots, there was mah crazy relative Alexander, & that nice guy who makes bad choices in companions, Ally Leopard.

Alex made a kind of leap into Miss Chris's lap where sat I comfortable till then. Somehow, laughing all the while, Miss Chris caught the leaping Alex before he crunched me, & she had us both in her lap now.

Ally walked up to us the regular way & said, "Alex is happy to see you. He said he would have joined you in your exile for fraternal loyalty, but he was busy conducting the last stages of some delicate Bump language negotiations to--"

"What are you saying, Ally?" I said, rudely, interrupting, but those weird English words were driving me crazy.

Ally shrugged. Ally smiled a little. "I don't know. I'm just the translator." Then he came up to me, & gave me a tiny kiss on mah cheekbone. "Welcome back, Algernon. I missed you."

"Hey! This is my Throne Room, not a train station!" yelled Sheila, who was getting grumpy again. I was getting more attention then her because of being a xil & all.

Before anyone could say anything more, there was the sound of marching just outside the Throne Room door, & in marched Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow, dressed in her Army of the Babys helmet & her green army diaper.

"Mwarch, Two, Thwee, Fwour! Mwarch, Two, Thwee, Fwour!" she ordered the army behind her, who was Ramie the Toy Tall Boy! An he was sound asleep!

"Army . . . hwalt!" she ordered, but Ramie kept sleep-marching, & he fell over Lisa!

"Waaaaa!" bawled Lisa.

"Ramie!" said Miss Chris, all happy. Ramie woke up briefly, & looked around him confused. Miss Chris crawled into his lap, carrying me & Alex. Then she picked up the crying Lisa & holded her too. Her lap was no vacancy, that's sure. Ramie fell asleep sitting up with all of us in his lap. He is the Lazybug Champ, for sure.

I think Princess Crissy wanted to sit in Ramie's lap too cuz she carried Sheila over, & shyly she waited for an invitation.

"Come on, Crissy!" said Miss Chris, & she made room, & so now we were all in Ramie's lap, & he was sound asleep still.

I was jealous of Sheila cuz she had a lap all to herself, & I didn't, & I was the exile! An Sheila knew it too cuz she slouched down in Crissy's like it was her own personal Throne.

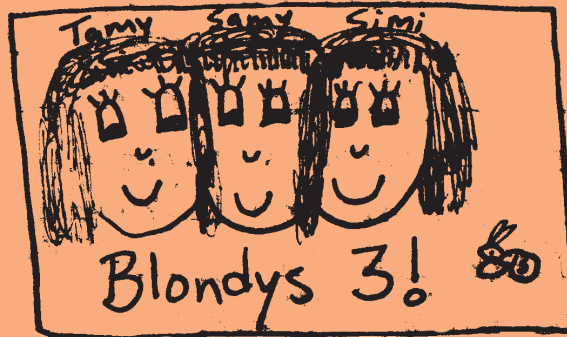
"Dum King," I muttered, stupidly, mistaking my ounce of brave for a pound, & bully Sheila for a nice little bunny.

"Traitor to the Crown!" Sheila yelled at me, & she tried to hop toward me & thwak me. Crissy held her back.

"Bump!" yelled Alex, but before Ally could translate, some more people came into the room. It was the Blondys 3!

They were smiling there nice Blondy smiles, & I knew they wouldn't let me get thwaked. They singed a silly song:

O! King Sheila was a grumpy old King,
 An a grumpy old King was she,
 She called for her carrot,
 & she called for her jazz,
 & she called for her
 Blondys 3!
 La! La! La!



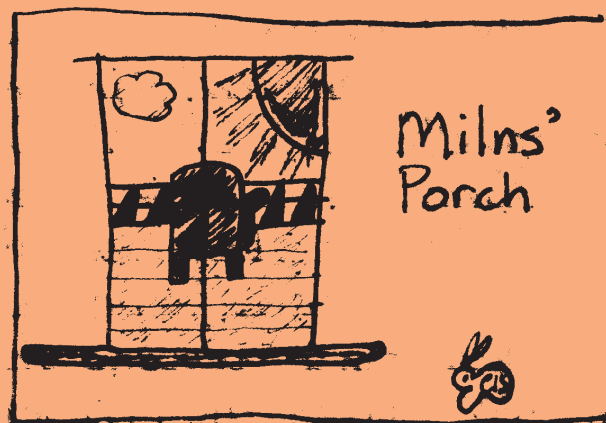
Each of the Blondys sang a La, & then they were all singing their La's together. (P.S.- O! Carrots! Yuk!)

I guess Ramie, even in his sleep, must have liked their singing cuz all of a sudden he was sleep-dancing around the room. An Miss Chris & Princess Crissy started to dancing with him.

I guess that was when I knew I was back in crazy ol' Bags End. Fighting & dancing & music & expert Lazybuggery & so on, that's Bags End as I know it. The Blondys went on singing & others were singing & dancing, & it was a lot of fun.

But I had to go. So I slipped out the door when nobody looking, & hurried to mah favorite place, which is Milne's Porch, just outside mah bedroom window.

"Milne's Porch, am I happy to see you! Mah comfy chair! Mah view of the sky! Yeah!"



This is what Milne's Porch looks like, drawed nicely by Miss Chris. I'm not in it cuz Miss Chris told me she drawed it while I was in xil, & she was sad 4or me. Nice girl, she.

So I hunkered down in mah chair & didn't think no thoughts 4or awhile. Then I thought I heard singing. Was it the Old King Sheila song coming all

the way from the Throne Room? No. That was a funny song, & the one I was hearing wasn't too funny.

Then I knew it was the Midnight Song of the Bunny Pillows. But it wasn't midnight!

Then I knew that I wasn't hearing it with mah ears. I was hearing it with mah heartbone. Even tho I was not in xil now, that wasn't really the point. What to do, dear readers? What to do? I didn't know.

Betsy is a proud Pillow. If I went & saw her in her Bunny Pillow Free State, she might not even tell me she was bored! She might even have me thrown out!

So I hunkered down even deeper in mah seat, & thought, & thought harder, & thought & thought.

Then there was a tap on mah window, & there was Ally Leopard! An he was burdened with no strange kin of mine.

"I thought you might want some company," he said shyly.

He came out & sat in mah comfy armchair with me. An I was very happy 4or his company.

An so, deer readers, I am not in xil no more. But what about Betsy? I don't know. I don't know. I don't know yet.

Time to Go See Betsy, & Alone

After all the problems I have had over Betsy Bunny Pillow, even being xiled & all, I still hadn't seen her, um, un-face. I started feeling like by the time I saw her, she wouldn't be bored & dissatisfied no more!

Now that I was an x-xil, now that mah struggles had made trying to see Betsy legal, it was no time to wait any longer. The thing is that I wanted to go alone. I didn't want a big expedition with Sheila leading the way on her BunnyCycle & everything. I didn't want Crissy to disguise me with her magic, or Blondys carrying me, or any of that stuff.

I wanted to go alone in mah native beagle, & face victory or losing by myself. Nobody but me was in on this. I was the last to see Betsy then, & I wanted to be the first to see her now. An if she put me in Pillow Prison, or tried to smother me, or tried to plant me, then I would take it alone.

Now I know some of mah deer readers may be wondering what manner of imposter is writing these words.

"Our Algernon is a confirmed cowardist!" say they. "His motto is 'Don't walk away from fear, run!' He knows that it's the little guys against the big guys in this wicked world of ours, & the little guys don't stand a chance!"

"Who are you, strange artificer, talking in beagle-like English? Where is our beloved, fear-filled Algernon?"

Well, deer readers, it's me & it's not like I was kidnapped by a mutant brave beagle, or that I fell into a gutter of liquid courage, or got Who-Am-I-nesia.

It's more like I know that I am right. An I have to do this. So I did.

I decided to see Sheila first. If mah newfound braveness didn't get scared & run away from her, then I could really trust it.

So I marched right into Sheila's Throne Room . . . & found Sheila & Miss Chris huddled together on the floor, studying maps & stuff. I saw pictures of Bunny Pillows in a big group, so I figured that must be the Bunny Pillow Free State.

"A-wa-wa!" said Miss Chris, all happy, when she saw me, & rushed over

Bags End News
 No. 252 February 11, 1995
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Tim too Go Seey Betsee, an Alon.

After awl the problems I have had
 over Betsee Buny Pillo, evin being xild
 annawl, I stil hadent' sin her las-
 too, um, fernichur. I startid feeling
 lik big the tim I saw her she woodent'
 bee bord an disatissfyd no mor!

Nowe that I waze a x, xil an waze
 doing mah papr normely agen with
 Lory riting it an me the editer of
 it an Shlela the king of it 4or some
 reezon, nowe that mah strugels had
 mad tryng too seey Betsee leget,
 it waz no tim too wate any longer.

The thing iz that I wantid too
 go alon. I dident' want a big ekspidi
 dishun with Shlela leeding the way
 on her Bunycikel an evrything. I

to give me a big hug & kiss.

"We're 4ormulating a plan to assault the Pillowville, & gain entrance to Betsy's town hall before her minions can stop us," said Sheila, all importantly, using lots of big words, & I think calling Betsy names at the same time.

"Sheila thinks it's gonna be a war or something. I told her that Betsy would never hurt me," said Miss Chris in her voice, & I was on her lap, & was getting mah head skritchd so I was dull & happy.

Then that silly baby Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow marched into the room & saluted Miss Chris & Sheila, who she thinks are generals in her Army of the Babys. Lisa gave me a mean "dum draft-dodging beagle" look, except in her baby voice way, with lots of W's.

"I weport thwat thwe Army is shwaping up vewy well. We are gwoing twoo mwarch up & ddown a lot untwil I sway twoops, dwismissed! As fwor the bweagle here, as swoon as he has been re-assimilated into cwivilian life, I will have hwim shwaped up twoo!"

"January, February, I won't March!" I yelled.

"You dwum bweagle!" Lisa yelled, as she tried to crawl into Miss Chris's lap to pummel me. Miss Chris thought this was very funny, & she laughed so hard I fell off her lap. Now Lisa tried to crawl around Miss Chris to get me.

"Leave me be, you you you baby you!" I yelled & I ran behind Sheila's Throne, & hided.

Now Sheila & Miss Chris were both laughing hard & Lisa was so mad that she wet her diaper, & then started crying.

"Waaaaa!" sayeth she.

So just at this moment when things were the craziest, that would be of course be the time when my nutty kin came walking in.

"Bump!" he said all around, as if this word meant lots of hello friendly kinds of things it didn't.

"Alex says hello, everybody, & he wants to report on the progress of his Bump operatives within the Bunny Pillow Free State perimeter," said that nice guy Ally Leopard, who walks a step behind, but knows lots of languages, even stupid made-up ones.

"Gwenerals! I mwust pwotest thwis pwuppy bweing mwade exempt fwum mwarching because of hwis Bwump convictions!" said Lisa, who I guess had 4orgotten about me hiding behind Sheila's Thone.

Alex said a lot of Bumps, so many they would probably waste a whole page of mah newspaper to write them down, so I won't.

I made up mah mind in the seconds be4or Ally told what all that stuff pretended to mean, & the minutes when Sheila would get bored with not having all the attention on herself, the way she likes it. I made up mah mind, dear readers, to run & run I did.

I runned through the Throne Room's door just as the Blondys were floating in, all smiles, & I runned & runned until I reached the door that leads to the road to Farmer Jones' Bunny Pillow Farm which is now the Bunny Pillow Free State.

Then I stopped. It took me awhile to catch my breath & calm down. It was as quiet on that road as it had been noisy in Sheila's Throne Room.

Now what?

I didn't have any of mah beagleboy journalism stuff with me or nothing. Just mah eyes & ears & mah memory.

I hoped Miss Chris would understand why I did what I did. I even hoped Sheila would. I had to do this alone.

I walked along pretty slowly & remembered the many times that I had

been here be4ore.

Mah mushy old heartbone missed some of those times. Being weeds with Princess Crissy. Even being a Bunny Pillow sort of with Betsy that last time.

What did I think I was doing? Was I crazed? Maybe.

But I kept walking, slowly, like mah friend Polly El does. I didn't sing her "Dee-da-dee-da-dee-dee" song tho. I almost did.

What was to come I didn't know, but at least after all this time I was gonna find out the answers about Betsy soon.

Tramping to the Bunny Pillow Free State!

This story about Betsy Bunny Pillow & how I got mixed up in it has gone on a long time. I don't know when it's going to end either. Because I am a beagleboy journalist & also that Betsy is mah friend sort of I have to keep on going.

So there I was, on the road to the Bunny Pillow Free State, which used to be Farmer Jones' Bunny Pillow Farm.

Now I don't really know what a free state is. I guess it's sort of like Connecticut where Miss Chris lives, & I guess where Bags End lives too, only it's for crazy Pillows. As I walked along, my curiosity & fear had a big argument.

Mah fear made a pretty good argument for hurrying back whence I came. All mah curiosity could do was to remind me that I was on mah way to being the first un-Pillow to see the Bunny Pillow Free State. Tho foolish in matters of braveness, mah curiosity was smart enough to sucker me on.

It was taking a long time tho. I walked & walked & the road kept coming up with 0 Pillows.

I decided to have some rest. I had walked a long time & there weren't no bully bunnys or babys or even Pillows 4or that matter to tell me no.

An what good luck came of mah halt. I stepped off the road & right into a whole field of Weeds! They made your humbled old regular citizen fella pal Algernon their King, you know. That's cuz I am their only friend & protector.

"Yea, King!" they yelled a lot.

"Hi, Weeds!" I said, all friendly. I don't get all puffed out about being King, like some bunnys I know who aren't real Kings anyway.

I like Weeds & they like me, but they don't have a lot to say after cheering me a lot. So I talked.

"Am I getting near the Bunny Pillow Free State?" I asked.

Weeds maybe must be like some kind of plant cousins to the Blondys because they didn't answer using out loud words. Instead, they used their together strength to hoist me into the air, & carried me along sort of like I was floating. I have been Weed-floated be4ore so I wasn't scared, & anyway I am the King of the Weeds guy, so I figured I was pretty safe.

I felt mahself being carried uphill more & more as I went along. At the top of the hill, I was gently slidded to the ground at the edge of the field. The Weeds all gave me a big cheer, & then returned to their blooming. Some people think only flowers bloom, but I bet they never watched a big beautiful field of Weeds happy in the springtime sun.

So . . . where was I?

Top of a big hill, fella, & a long ways below me was a huge field of Pillows, fields & fields really, bigger than Farmer Jones' Bunny Pillow Farm had ever tried.

Bags End News
 No. 253. February 18, 1995
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Tramping too the Buny Pillo Frey Stat!

Thiz storee about Betsee Buny Pillo
 an how I got awl mixxed up in it
 haz gon on along tim. I dont' no
 wen itz' gonna end ither. Becuz I
 am a beegelboye jernelizt an allso
 that Betsee iz mah frend sortuf I
 hav too keep on going.

So therr I waz, on the rode too
 the Buny Pillo Frey Stat ~~an~~ wich uzd
 too bee Farmr Joneses' Buny Pillo farm.

Nowe I dont' reelly no wat
 a frey stat iz. I gess itz' sortuf
 lik Konetikut weer Mees Chrees livs
 an I gess weer Bagzend livs to
 onlee itz 4or crazee pillos. Az
 I wawkd allong mah Kuriositee an
 feer had a big argumint.

I was the first un-Pillow to use mah un-Pillow eyes to see the Bunny Pillow Free State!

4or awhile, I didn't want to move. It was a sunny day in this strange place, & I felt like I should just look 4or awhile. After all, I didn't know what was to come. Welcome? Yah, right. Capture? Maybe.

I decided to do more than look, but to look with mah brains. If I did that good, maybe I would see things that had changed since Farmer Jones left, & Betsy began.

Much bigger. But I already knew that. The rows of Pillows were as neat as ever. I guess Betsy couldn't or didn't figure out no new way to grow Pillows.

Then I wondered who grew Bunny Pillows at the start? Farmer Jones? I thinked not.

Were there always live Pillows? Was it magic or morning ocean or a dream gone wild that had made Pillows who live & talk?

But they live & talk only when growing. Then their talk becomes whisper & then always quiet & they get picked & stiff & stop for good. Until Betsy said no to the Midnight Song of the Bunny Pillows, their goodbye to be, & she escaped.

What was I missing in all this? I wondered as I stood on that sunny hill looking down to the fields of Pillows below.

Farmer Jones must have been overthrown by Pillows like Betsy who picked themselves & so somehow stayed alive.

But did they pick themselves over days, or all in that last night?

An what else? What didn't I know? What would I never know because I am a un-Pillow, & Betsy would never tell me?

I knew that I had to calm down. All this stuff I didn't know about Bunny Pillows & their Free State was piling almost as high as the hill I was on.

But I knowed stuff too. I decided to think about this 4or awhile.

I have knowed Betsy 4or a very long time. I have been the guy who has writed about all her attacks on Farmer Jones in mah newspaper. And that means I was in on them too.

What is Betsy like then? She is very obsessed with her Pillow-kind. She loves lollipops (O! Yuk!) She hates balloons. She loves John Cougar records even tho he is a un-Pillow. She loves being in charge, & she gets very mad if someone like me doesn't listen to her, or if someone like Sheila wants to be the guy in charge instead of her.

The Bunny Pillow Free State would probably be a lot like this stuff. Betsy would be in charge, & there would be lots of stuff Bunny Pillows would have to do because they're Bunny Pillows.

Betsy always let me be around because she knew I would write about her adventures in mah newspaper. Knowing all of this stuff, I decided on a plan. I would go down to the Bunny Pillow Free State, & tell Betsy that all the world wanted to know how her new land was doing. I figgered Betsy would probably be all mean & scary that I trespassed mah non-Pillow self on her Pillow grounds. Then she would be all boastful about how good it all was.

What I wanted to know was if I was right & she was deep-down bored there.

O fine. Me & mah smart-brained plan. Me thinking I am like Lori with the smarts, or Sheila & her wriggly trickyness.

Me going down the hill so confident that 4or once I knew what was happening around me.

Me scooped up in a net halfway down the hill, tossed into a captured

bag, & hauled away to who knows where.
 Dummy ol' me!

Betsy's Busy! Betsy's Busy!

As the story I've been telling you dear readers has gone on, it gets stranger & stranger. I thought mah vision of bored Betsy made mah mission clear: to go get Betsy from the Bunny Pillow Free State & bring her back to Bags End. But mah plan went weird from the first place.

And now I was in a captured bag, & let me tell you that being carried around in a bag is terrible. Plus it was really more like being dragged along than carried anyway. I was getting bumped worse than mah silly brother Alexander's made-up talk!

Then the bag stopped. I was scared to climb out cuz I figgered that anyone mean enough & tricky enough to capture & bag me could do worse if I tried to capture & bag mah freedom back.

I guess I fell asleep, a Lazybug sleep too because when I woked up I wasn't in the bag no more. I was in darkness, lying on something soft & warm.

"Relax & go back to sleep if you would like," whispered a voice from the softness below me. For just a second I thought I was lying on fluffy Betsy herself. But the voice was different from Betsy's somehow. It was the voice of someone who didn't know me. So surprised, I leaped into the air & landed on another soft spot nearby.

"Are you really one of the creatures She lived with all those years?" asked a voice below mah belly. I looked there & saw a Pillow with a big face in it!

Did I jump this time!

"Hi, um, bugel!" said a sort of young sounding Betsy voice below me.

"YIP!" yelled me, almost dog-like.

No matter where I jumped in this dark room, I landed on a Pillow face & voice too. I was crazed 4or a untalking seat with no face either.

Finally, I leaped into a spot where 2 walls met, & there was a tiny space of no talk & no face.

An there I sat. The Pillows in the room got quiet after I quit jumping on them.

Where was Betsy? I wondered. An who were all these weird new kind of Bunny Pillows with faces in them? An why was the room almost all dark?

Now I must say, dear readers, that as strange & different as us Bags End guys may be, what we are most alike about is being stubborn & not liking to be held back. That's what was going on, & I couldn't have it no mre.

Gathering up mah shards of braveness, like scattered rays of dusk at sunset, I tippy-toe-jumped mah way from where I had been to the door I saw far away.

The voices jumped at me as I jumped on them along the way.

"Where do bugels live?"

"Does She like you?"

"You sure hop a lot! Are you a Bunny Bugel?"

Finally I reached the door, & pushed at it, & fell through, & stayed where I was in the light for a moment. I couldn't see yet. I stayed still.

By mistake I said out loud the big question in mah mind: "Where's Betsy?"

From the dark room behind me, I heard a lot of voices whisper: "Betsy's

Bag's End News
No. 254. February 25, 1995
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: Sheila Bunny
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Betsees' Bizee! Betsees' Bizey!

As the storee I hav bin teling
yu, deer needrs goz, on, it gets stranger
an stranger. I thawt that mth wihun
of kord Betsee mad mah mishun
cleer, go get Betsee from the Buny
Pillo Freay Stat an bring her bak too
unboring Bagzend.

Mah plan went weerd from the ferst
plas. Aftr beeing exxited from Bagzend
for wanting too bring Betsee bak I then
escapd crazee from theer throo the
dop too the rod too the Buny Pillo Freay
Stat. Then the rod waz long an
mah frends the Weedz had too help
me out. Then I waz Kapchurd and
baggd wil I waz downhil bound too
see Betsee an her kin.

busy! Betsy's busy!" I runned so fast away then that I don't think even a hopping mad Sheila could have caught me.

Before I could think straightly again, I was falling through a door to the outside, & then down some steps to the ground. Nobody was chasing me, but I still felt scared being a un-Pillow in the Bunny Pillow Free State.

I looked around me & saw again the big fields of Bunny Pillows that I had seen before. I even saw far away the hill from which I had seen the Pillows, & where I had been captured & bagged.

The day was sunny & the fields were quiet. What was I doing here? Was I crazed?

"Where's Betsy?" I said all frustrated.

"Betsy's busy! Betsy's busy!" said hundreds of growing pillows' whispery voices. They did this 4or awhile, & then quieted down again.

OK. Fine. Betsy's busy. Where? Doing what?

I looked back at the house from which I had felled. It was Farmer Jones' old house. It looked terrible. There were broken windows in it, & the roof had a big hole.

Well, thoughteth me, Betsy is sure not busy fixing up her new house.

But, I thought some more, would Betsy even make this her home? After all, her xile headquarters in Bags End had been a tree house that was outside. An she had growed up outside in these fields.

I didn't think she was back in the fields, tho, cuz Betsy is a big shot like Sheila, & big shots like to be separate from their followers, & higher up than them too. Another tree house, maybe?

Or was Betsy busy making her new home?

Too many questions. I decided that I had to find Betsy, that she wasn't in the farmhouse or in the fields. I had never been behind the farmhouse, so I walked toward the other side of it.

I was almost to the backside when the most horrible thing happened to me. From the skys fell thousands & thousands of carrots on & around me. O! Yuk!

O! Yuk!

O! YUK!

YUK! YUK! YUK!

Sheila's best dream was mah worst nightmare. I couldn't escape because the carrots kept falling & were burying me. I tried to swim away from the ocean of carrots to the shores of relief, but this failed, & then I remembered that beagles can't swim.

"O! Help! I'm drowning!" I cried. "O! Yuk! I'm drowning!"

I guess I fainted cuz all of a sudden the carrots went away & I was in the dark & calm.

"Hi, Algernon!" said a nice voice I sort of knowed.

"Hi, Suzy Dark!" I said, making a hopeful guess.

"Don't worry. You're safe now," said the voice some more.

"Did you save me, Suzy?" I asked, because I was curious, & also because I wanted to say thank you.

"Sort of. I heard you yelling 4or help."

"Did Freddy Dark or Baby Dark or Mommy Dark help?" asked me, all excited. I like the Dark Family.

"No. Um, Algernon, I'm not Suzy Dark."

I got suspicious. "You're not a Pillow with a face, are you?"

"No. Open your eyes & see."

Slowly I opened mah eyes. I was in mah own bed! Surrounding me were Miss Chris, Sheila Bunny, & the guy who talked, Princess Chrisakah of Imagianna!

Is Your Old Pal Algernon Nuts!?

I am sitting on Milne's Porch, a place that was a present to me, & is got to through mah bedroom window, & I am thinking about all the time I have spent away from Bags End. Helping Betsy try to defeat Farmer Jones, being a xile when nobody believed that Betsy was bored in her victory, & captured & carrot rainstormed (O! Yuk!) in the Bunny Pillow Free State, & only being told in answer to my asked again & again question that "Betsy's busy! Betsy's busy!"

Well, I failed to even see Betsy, or find out if I was right about her being bored & unhappy in her Bunny Pillow Free State. Princess Crissy rescued me back to Bags End, which was good, but I have no answers to anything.

Now I don't want mah dear readers to think that I have a grudge against mah native land. No, sir. It's a crazy place sometimes, but it's mine, & I'm its too.

What makes me mad about being here is that all these things I have done have come to not. Should I give up? Is a busy Betsy a happy Betsy? Is it mah business to know?

This is your old pal Algernon writing at a later time about what happened next. I had 2 really nice visitors to Milne's Porch to see me named Miss Chris & Leona Lion.

Miss Chris sat in mah comfy armchair, & helded me & Leona in her lap. She was happy & hugged us both. Then Leona said "grr" nicely & gived me a kiss on mah big ol' beagle nosebone.

"I think you were very brave, Algernon," said Leona.

"Why?" quoth me.

"You were worried about Betsy, & you went all by yourself to see her. A lot of people think you're brave in Bags End, not just me."

I looked at Miss Chris, & I was really frustrated. "Mommy, I didn't do anything! I just got thwarted in mah plan! I failed!"

First, Miss Chris smiled at me. Then she stopped smiling. I got hopeful. Maybe I would hear something that wasn't o-Algernon-you-brave-guy stuff.

"Are you giving up?" asked Miss Chris.

Finally, a good question. I thought for a minute, but no good answer came to mah brain.

Miss Chris looked at Leona, then said, "We better go, Grr-Girl. I think Algernon needs to be alone to think."

"Bye, Algernon!" they said with their girl voices together, & filled mah furry cheekbones with kisses. Then they went through mah bedroom back to regular Bags End.

So. What now? I thought about the whole thing from mah Pillow-disguise days to now.

What was missing? Then I knew.

Farmer Jones! What? asked me. Farmer Jones! said me again.

But he is gone!

Yes, but why?

Because Betsy beat him!

No, she didn't!

Then I remembered the day I went with Betsy to record her final battle with him. Just as I lost sight of her, bouncing down the road toward the Bunny Pillow Farm, he appeared, all beat up & stuff, & running away in

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 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Written Down By: Lear Bunny

IZ Yor Old Pal Algernon
 NUTZ?

I am siting on Milns Porch, a
 plas that waz a prezant too me an
 iz got thru mah bedrum windo,
 an I am thinking about how I hav
 spent allot of tim away from Bagz
 end.

First I waz a part of Betsee Buny
 Pillas' wining plan too dee feet Farmr
 Joneses an mak hiz Buny Pillo Farm
 intoo her dreemdup Buny Pillo Freey Stat.
 It werkd an I kam hom.

Then I waz a xil from Bagzend
 cuz nobudee woud bee leev mah vizzhun
 that I had rit in this plas that
 Betsee waz bord an unhapy living in

defeat.

So?

So it must be that the secret Pillow Revolutionaries or whatever they are had beat Jones already.

So?

When I went to the Bunny Pillow Free State, I was scared from mah wits by Bunny Pillows with faces.

So?

Bunny Pillows don't have faces, ya dum guy!!!

Hey! I am you!

O. I forgot. Sorry.

Now I wasn't sure, but I think I finally figgered out what was going on.

It had to do with Farmer Jones giving up & Bunny Pillows with faces when Bunny Pillows don't have faces.

I tramped back & forth in mah mind until all mah energies were flat & then gone.

Why was it only me who saw all of this stuff? What about Sheila Bunny & Miss Chris & Princess Crissy?

Was your old pal Algernon nuts!?

Just as I loudly thought this, I heard a friendly but unwanted weird sound at mah bedroom's window.

"Bump? Bump?" said mah brother Alexander in his rebel-against-good-languages-like-English way. Without waiting to be asked, which would have been a good long wait too, Alex climbed out onto mah porch, & came up to me where I sat in mah armchair, & he bumped me all fraternal & friendly.

"Leave me be, ya dum brother!" I said. "I am considering mah dilemma in honest English."

Well, Alex ignored me completely, & I saw him looking not at me no more, but at the window to our bedroom. I looked too & saw that nice language-knowing guy Ally Leopard shyly waiting 4or me to notice him & maybe invite him onto mah porch. Why couldn't Alex do this too?

"Come on out, Ally, & we will gang up on this fake-language guy, & defeat his intent!" I yelled kind of crazed, cuz I knew Ally would do no such thing.

So Ally came out, & Alex said lots more Bumpstuff.

"Algernon, Alex says he has important information 4or you from his operatives in the Bunny Pillow Free State," Ally said longly.

"What are operatives? Are they like Bump missionaries?" I asked suspiciously.

Ally laughed. "No! They're spies & they're in the Bunny Pillow State to find out what's really going on there."

I looked at Alex's silly face. "How can a guy who speaks a fake one word language have spies? And how come they didn't get captured & bagged like I did?"

"Bump! Bump-Bump! Bump Bump Bump Bump Bump!" said Alex, who got so excited that he said Bump words, & bumped mah nosebone with his too.

"Leave me be, ya mono-worded crazy guy!" I yelled.

"Bump!" yelled Alex, all unhappy, & he retreated to a corner of the porch, & he sat down to suck his toe sadly.

Ally looked at me seriously. "Algernon, I know Bump language makes you mad, but this time it's really important. I'm your English-speaking friend, & I wouldn't fool you, would I?" And he looked at me with his sparkly green eyes.

Humbled a bit, I got out of mah armchair & went over to the sadly toe-sucking Alexander.

"Dear Alex, I am sorry 4or being mean to you. Won't you please join me in mah comfy armchair, & tell me your story?" I said as nicely as I could stand.

Now Alex is not one to hold a grudge, if you say sorry to him. He was on his feet saying happy Bump words, & sitting in mah armchair waiting for me be4ore I knew it.

4or once, I was reluctant to sit in mah armchair, but I went over & sat next to Alex. Ally Leopard quietly stood nearby.

"Now, Alex, we must not be selfish with this comfy armchair. We must make room 4or our friend Ally Leopard," said me sort friendly still, but getting very tired of this whole thing.

Anyway, we all somehow ended up together in mah armchair & it was almost kind of comfy still, in a crowded way.

"OK, brother," quoth me, "talk or Bump or whatever you do."

So Alexander bumped to beat the band, or beat to bump the band, or something. I refuse to fill mah pages with as many Bumps as that silly kin said. Instead I will talk about what Ally told me that Alex said.

"He said that you're going about helping Betsy in the wrong way. Farmer Jones didn't lose to Betsy, & she isn't bored like you thought. Farmer Jones has won, & Betsy is going crazy!"

I asked a lot of questions along the way. What I figgered out from it all was that mah vision I have talked about wasn't as smart as I thought, or maybe mah vision was too smart 4or me.

I began to get down & mad at mahself, & sad too. What a dum guy I was!

I guess I 4orgot about Ally & Alex for awhile because all of a sudden I was surprised by a bump.

"Algernon, you were right to be concerned about Betsy not being happy," Ally said, trying to be helpful.

"But I made all this trouble & I was wrong! An who knows what's happening with Betsy!" yelled me.

Alex said a lot more Bump words & I tried to listen through mah upsetness.

"Alex says that his operatives don't really know much more except that finding Farmer Jones is the way 4or you to help Betsy," said Ally.

After getting so upset, I started to calm down. All I had done so far, & mah silly brother knows more than me about it all.

"Thank you, brother," I said, & I gived him a little kiss on his nose & a little hug. Alex made lots of happy Bump sounds, but was smart enough not to bump me anymore.

Then I smiled at Ally Leopard, & said thank you to him too. He was looking at Alex tho.

"Bump," Alex said quietly.

"Alex says that he hopes you will get help from Sheila & Princess Crissy & Miss Chris this time. After all, he wants to remind you, Farmer Jones is a mean guy who signed the Anti-Bump Declaration."

"What?" yelped me.

"Wait, Algernon, there's more. You see, it was because of this that Alex put Bump operatives at the Bunny Pillow Farm in the first place. He wanted to make sure the growing Pillows weren't being poisoned with a lot of anti-Bump propaganda."

"He said all that hard stuff with one Bump?" I yelled.

Alex smiled at me in his silly way. Ally shrugged his thin leopard

shoulders, & said, "I just translate, Algernon."

Bump operatives. Fooey. I wondered what Betsy would think about this. I hoped she would never find out, & vowed not to tell her if I could.

Alex & Ally left, & I was left alone on mah porch, sitting in mah comfy armchair.

I wanted to sit quietly & figger out what I could in the privacy of mah brainbone. At the same time, I was feeling more & more helpless about the whole thing.

After all, what kind of story was this now? Betsy's? Where had appeared in all these happenings even a ounce of her fluffy person?

Was I reporting this story, or making it, & then talking about mah makings?

What I needed at that moment was someone smart on mah side. And a good hugger too 4or mah weary self.

An she came. An her name is Miss Chris, mah beautiful adopted personmommy who smiles at me like she wants someone with it, & somehow that's me.

"Hi, Awawa!" she said her special kind of mah name. I was so happy to see her that I leaped from mah chair into her arms & barked a happy bark, & licked her cheeks & nosebone.

Me!

O! Yuk!

Miss Chris sat in mah armchair with me in her lap. She was half happy & half surprised by mah traditional K9 actions.

"Awawa, why are you acting like a regular puppy?" she asked.

I looked at her, feeling all weird.

"I don't know, mommy. I'm so upset about finding out that Farmer Jones won somehow, & Betsy is crazed or something." I told her what Alex & Ally had just told me.

"It doesn't sound like you know a lot more than you did," Miss Chris said.

"What should I do, mommy?" I asked.

Miss Chris looked hard into the sky beyond the safe railing of Milne's Porch, & patted mah back's fur, & thinked quietly for awhile.

"We should get Sheila & go see Princess Crissy right away."

Why I did what I did next, I don't know. I leaped from Miss Chris's arms, & dashed through mah bedroom window, & ranned around like a crazy guy till I found a dog leash somewhere, & then trotted happily back to Miss Chris with it in mah mouth, & then I dropped it at her feet, & waited, breathing all loudly with mah tongue hanging out!

"Algernon!" Miss Chris yelled, all worried, & she used mah regular name too.

She picked me up, & looked me over, from top to bottom, to check me out.

"Mommy?" I asked quietly.

"Yes, Awawa?"

"O! Dog leash! Yuk!" yelled me so loud & hard that I fell out of Miss Chris's arms, & onto the hard floor of Milne's Porch.

Miss Chris picked me up right away, & she hugged me, & holded me, & said nice soft com4orting things to me. She babyed me so much that like a baby I fell right asleep.

When I waked up, I was in a familiar room I couldn't remember where right away. I looked around carefully & sniffed carefully too. There were R.E.M. posters on the wall, & it smelled like a very sweet princess I know.

Something was wrong with mah eyes too cuz I couldn't see no colors, &

everything looked sort of flat.

A really pretty girl hurried over to me. She sat down on the edge of the bed I was on.

"Mumumumu?" she asked.

Now what language was this? She put her hand near mah face & I sniffed it carefully. It sniffed friendly, so I licked it.

"Algernon, what is wrong with you?" she asked, Princess Crissy asked.

Well, the colors came back from where they were hiding, I knew where I was.

"Crissy, please don't get mad, but I do have mah principles, so O! Hand! Yuk!" bellowed me.

Crissy smiled & said, "That was a good trick, Algernon! You fooled me a lot!"

"Crissy, I wasn't, um, acting. I am full of weird."

Miss Chris came into the room then. She was wearing a white shirt over her regular one, & she had her doctor's bag. So she was Doctor Miss Chris.

Before anyone could say anything, Sheila Bunny came hopping in, with not her dress on. On her back sat this little furry green guy with friendly eyes & face, but no body. They were Doctor Purple Purple Eyes, & Doctor Greenface.

"Algernon, all the doctors in Bags End have come to check on you, & figger out what is wrong," said Crissy.

Boy! This didn't sound good! I got scared & runned away from all of them & down the stairs out the castle front door, & hopped on Sheila's BunnyCycle Beatrix, & yelled for it to please help me escape.

Yah, right. That dum cycle roared to life, giving me hope, but then it just roar hopped into the Castle, & up the stairs, & back to Crissy's room, where it dumped me on the bed, & then left!

The doctors had me trapped.



Read Part 3 in Cenacle | 99 | April 2017!

* * * * *





Jimmy Heffernan


Paradox

Something from nothing, a relevant theme,
 Holding two ends together, a sensible scheme.
 A common thread tied into all nature's weaving,
 Also tied up in the soul's set plans for leaving.

Solar rising and setting, the main fundamental,
 Cyclical time, with its force elemental.
 Then linear time, with its future-past thought,
 All balanced together, a new consciousness wrought.

To live deep in the present, but still interact,
 In social dimensions is an ennobling act.
 The tension primordial, yet manifest here,
 Inside time and out, so far yet so near.

Ambiguity, feeling, subjective emotions,
 More of a guide than the more abstract notions.
 Hold in your heart a conflicting objective,
 Align with the cosmos, the deepest directive.

* * * * *





Hartley's Righteous Rants

*I can see clearly now, the rain is gone,
I can see all obstacles in my way
Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind
It's gonna be a bright (bright), bright (bright)
Sunshiny day.*

—Johnny Nash, 1972

Immigration

Although I don't agree with everything Trump says, his objective analysis and legal duty as President is to enforce existing law to restore border integrity. Illegal aliens are illegal, and deportation is not radical or racist. President Jimmy Carter deported thousands of Iranians in a short time in 1980, after Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini ruled that the 50 American hostages were to remain in the hands of the militants then occupying the U.S. Embassy in Tehran.

Illegals are from all countries. Uncontrolled mass immigration is very dangerous, and in direct violation of the U.S. Constitution. Illegal immigration is most detrimental to the poor. The legal immigrants are suffering injustice and duplicitous process. The blacks and Latinos are hardest hit. So I don't see how protecting citizens from unknown and hostile forces through border control, as both a Constitutional duty and oath of office, can be twisted into racism.

Trump said the laws need to be updated so legal immigration can be made more efficient, and disease and crime can be stopped at the border.

Political Parties

You know that it doesn't make any significant difference which major party is in power. The will of the money-lenders is done regardless. The only difference is with issues they don't care about.

What they care about is war and war and more war. We have been at war with poor and defenseless people in countries that the globalists want something from, or as part of a long-term relentless takeover of the planet.

Climate Change

Science is the method to understand the physical world. Scientists use data and modeling to create a theory. The theory is tested by prediction of results of experiments. Since we don't have another earth or time machine, we simply have been looking at unproven theories about climate change.

Whether the addition of 100 parts per million of carbon to the atmosphere produces warming or cooling or anything at all is objectively unknown. The earth has been going through long-term ice ages, with short periodic warm periods, for 2.5 million years. The ice age that ended 12,000 years ago was the coldest, and resulted in mass extinctions.

The ice will return sooner or later, no matter what we do. The earth is not a closed system, and fluctuations in solar cycles and magnetic fields are more relevant to climate than CO₂.

The supernova impact from this past summer actually reversed the solar wind, temporarily allowing a great influx of cosmic rays and atmospheric collapse that resulted in massive floods. The sun is in a three-hundred-year minimum cycle. No sunspots today. No spots—no flares—no charging our magnetic shield. As the earth's field plummets, and the poles move faster across the Arctic, we are in a probable magnetic reversal. And we are moving into a probable mini-ice age, like three hundred years ago.

A Plan

You've got to have a plan for disaster survival. Pack a bug-out bag. Weather radio. Crank light. A dozen cans of Sterno. Short-wave receiver. Rifle. And most importantly: Spam, Spam, Spam, and more Spam. I know the shit is gross but it keeps for many years, doesn't need cooking and, when the sun farts in our general direction, you got options. Just saying.

A. and I were discussing if we were part of any larger cultural movement that we could label simply. Well, it seems that although we overlap many, none really take us all in, and labels like *environmentalist* include aspects that we don't fall under.

So it needs to include aspects of the following movements: local economy, raw milk, natural clothing, hemp, DIY, low-tech, traditionalism, patriotism, simplicity, religious freedom, self-governance, cooperatives, private ownership, environmental, back to earth, nuclear family, elder care, childcare, community, volunteerism, home schooling, family doctor, animal welfare, modesty, craft, practical skills, Etsy.com, barter-n-trade, charity, love, law, and truth movements.

I think have coined the term: Alt-Amish.

* * * * *

Colin James

The Conceptual, It's An Experience

A technician or gaffer,
independent of the special effects person,
placed the clear glass table down
directly over the cameraman
who lay on his back.

The youngish model squatted on the table,
and shat succinctly, in good order,
two formidable turds.

This particular Angel of Defecation
was inspired by the Franco Canarvo
school of cinema, northeast.

Essential attributions & short-listed theories
remain in a shoe box, with no lid.

* * *

A Non-Compliant Student Venting to a Gamer

Normally it wouldn't matter,
this wheelbarrow of a behind I carry,
swollen with parenthetic passion.

All the urges that twist torque,
such as a rendezvous not kept,
by eye looks and arm tits,
dismissive of whatever is not there.

My walk has become uneven,
two legs loiter without thinking,
then follow along systematically present.

Shoes worn inside out, upside down.
The leather is rubbing, becoming opinionated,
can't say as I agree with that.

And the rocking chairs are masturbating
all over my perishables again,
having never made peace the first time.

* * *

**An Old Friend Found Wandering Incognizant
Near the Drake-Mars Experiment**

Your god at the height of her powers
had just placed an imitation carnation
on the sculptured rocket.

I wasn't thinking of penises nor
ballerinas as I helped you to your car.

The back seat was full of rubbish,
and you smelled like burning hair.

The crumbling chain-link fence
was not hard to see beyond,
so I drove you home through
and past deliberating loiterers.

You thanked them all personally with
all the adjectives you could still find.

* * *

Isaac the Dark Eyed Wanderer

Arguing winds,
I can't get a word in.
My lips are internalizing.

Gratuity, I was promised
a seasonal share,
wheat and fatalistic rye,
for the debt of pride.

It's in the rock,
it's in my hair,
it's in my shit.

I consented to this,
to walk the whole year
vicariously.

* * * * *





Kraft Dinner

[Classic Fiction]

*Excerpted from So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away,
Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1982.*

The truck rattled to a stop and they got out. They were not surprised to see me because I was their uninvited houseguest, almost every night.

"Hello," they both said in very slow unison that sounded as if it had originated quite close to Oklahoma. It was not a big friendly hello nor was it a little unfriendly hello. I just said a simple hello hello. I think they were still making up their minds about me.

I was sort of on probation, but I felt as if I were making some progress toward developing a minor pond comrades-in-catfish friendship with them. I had all summer to get to know them. I would outlast them.

Last week they asked me if I wanted to sit down on their couch with them, though that was very difficult because they both were so big that they practically took up the entire couch themselves. I barely made it on the couch with them like the last final squeeze of toothpaste from a tube.

They were both in their late thirties and over six feet tall and weighed in excess of 250 pounds, and they both wore bib overalls and tennis shoes. I haven't the slightest idea what they did for a living because they never said a single word about what kind of job they did.

I had a feeling whatever they did for a living, they did together. They were the kind of people who looked as if they were never apart. I could see them coming to work together, working together, having lunch together and always wearing the same clothes. Whatever they did required that they wear bib overalls and tennis shoes.

I could see them filling out employment forms.

Under the line that asked about previous experience. They just put down "bib overalls and tennis shoes."

I also had a feeling that whatever they did, they came directly from work to the pond. I don't think they changed their clothes because different, but always matching pairs of bibs and tennis shoes were their entire wardrobe.

I could imagine them even having special overalls and tennis shoes for church with the rest of the congregation sitting apart from them.

Well, whatever they did for a living hadn't made them rich because the furniture on the back of their truck was well-worn and looked as if it had not been very expensive to begin with. It looked like ordinary used furniture or the stuff you'd find in any furnished apartment where the rent was cheap.

Their furniture was a replica of the furniture that I had lived with all my twelve years. New furniture has no character whereas old furniture always has a past. New furniture is always mute, but old furniture can almost talk. You can almost hear it talking about the good times

and troubles it's seen. I think there is a Country and Western song about talking furniture, but I can't remember the name.

After their perfunctory hello to me, they took the couch off the truck. They were both so efficient and strong that the couch came off the back of the truck like a ripe banana out of its skin. They carried it over to the pond and put it down very close to the water's edge, so they could fish right off it, but still leaving enough space so as not to get their tennis shoes wet.

Then they went back to the truck and got a big stuffed easy chair. The chair did not match the couch which was an Egyptian-mummy-wrapping beige. The stuffed chair was a blood-fading red.

She took the chair off by herself while he stood there waiting to take something off himself. As soon as the stuffed chair was on its way to join the couch by the pond's edge, he got two end tables off the truck and put them on each side of the couch. By this time she had gone back and gotten a rocking chair and set it up.

Then they took a small wood cookstove off the truck and they began creating a little kitchen in the corner of their living room.

The sun was just setting and the pond was totally calm. I could see the old man standing on his boat dock across from us watching. He was motionless as they unloaded their furniture. Everything was shadowy on his part of the pond and he was just another shadow textured among thousands of other shadows.

They took a box of food and cooking things off the truck and a small table to use for preparing their evening meal. The man started a fire in the stove. They even brought their own wood. He was very good at starting fires because the stove was hot enough to cook on momentarily.

Redwing blackbirds were standing on the ends of the cattails and making their final night calls, saying things to other birds that would be continued the next morning at dawn.

I heard my first cricket chirp.

That cricket sounded so loud and so good that he could have been a star in a Walt Disney movie. Walt should have sent some scouts out and signed him up.

The man started cooking hamburgers.

They smelled good, but I did not pay the attention to them that I would the following February and the long months that I mulled over hamburgers after the shooting. To me now they were just the good smell of hamburgers cooking.

The woman got three once-electric floor lamps that had now been converted to kerosene use off the truck. The kerosene worked real nice, though of course the lamps were not as bright as they would have been if they used electricity.

There was another interesting thing about those lamps. The people had never bothered to remove the cords. They were still fastened to the lamps. The cords didn't look wrong, but they didn't look right either. I wonder why they didn't take them off.

The woman put a floor lamp next to each end table beside the couch and lit them. The light from the lamps shined down on the end tables.

Then the woman got a cardboard box off the truck and took two photographs out of the box. They were in large ornate frames. I believe one photograph was of her parents and the other photograph was of his parents. They were very old photographs and tinted in the style of long ago. She put them down on one of the tables.

On the other table she put an old clock that had a heavy somber ticking to it. The clock sounded as if eternity could pull no tricks on it. There was also a small brass figure of a dog beside the clock. The figure looked very old and was a companion and watchdog for the clock.

Did I mention that she put a lace doily on the surface of that table before she put the dog and clock there?

Well, I have now, and there was also a lace doily on the end table that held the photographs of their parents. I might add that their parents were not wearing bib overalls and tennis shoes. They were dressed formally in perhaps the style of the 1890s.

There was another kerosene lamp burning on the worktable beside the stove where the burgers were cooking, but it was a traditional lamp. I mean, it looked like a kerosene lamp.

The man was also boiling some water for Kraft dinner and there was a can of pears on the table.

That was going to be their dinner tonight: 32 years ago.

The smoke rising from the stove sought desperately for a pipe but not finding one just drifted slowly around like an absentminded cripple.

Their living room was now completely set up except that I have forgotten to mention the *National Geographic* magazines that were on both end tables. Sometimes when the fishing was slow they would just read the *National Geographic* while waiting for a bite.

They drank a lot of coffee from a huge metal coffeepot that he was now filling with water from the pond. They also drank the coffee out of metal cups. They put a lot of sugar in their coffee. Every night they used a pound box of sugar. You could almost walk on their coffee. An ant would have been in paradise if it drank coffee.

While they were setting up this living-room ritual of life beside the pond, I sat in some grass nearby, just watching them, saying nothing.

They hardly spoke either and this evening, their conversation was mostly about people who weren't there.

"Father, Bill would have liked this place," she said.

They always called each other Mother or Father when they called each other anything. They did not spend a lot of time talking to each other. They had spent so much time together that there probably wasn't much more to be said.

"Yes, Mother, he would have been happy here. This is a good pond."

"I don't know why people have to move all the time, Father."

"Neither do I, Mother."

He flipped over a hamburger in the frying pan on the stove.

"Betty Ann moved in 1930," he said.

"That means Bill must have moved in either 1929 or 1931 because they moved a year apart," she said.

"I don't know why either of them moved," he said.

"Well, don't forget: we moved, too," she said.

"But it was different with us. We had to move," he said. "They didn't have to move. They just could have stayed there. They could still be there if they wanted to be," he said.

She didn't say anything after he said that.

She just busied herself with the living room beside the pond, futzing like women do when they want to think something over and it needs time.

More crickets had joined in with the first cricket, but the new crickets were not star

material. They were just ordinary crickets. No one from Hollywood would ever come to Oregon and sign them up.

I could barely see the old man across the pond on his dock staring at us, but he was fading very rapidly away. When night gets started, it just won't stop.

"How's the Kraft dinner?" she asked, sort of absentmindedly.

She had a feather duster in her hand and was dusting off their furniture that had gotten dusty because of the long gray destroyed road that had taken them to this pond in Oregon in late July 1947, the second year after the sky stopped making all that noise from endless flights of bombers and fighter planes passing overhead like the Hit Parade records of World War II, playing too loud on a jukebox that went all the way to the stars.

I was so glad the War was over.

I stared into the silence of the sky that used to be filled with warplanes.

"It's OK," he said. "I always thank the Kraft people for inventing Kraft dinner because you never have any trouble cooking it. A lot more things should be like Kraft dinner. Nice and Easy. Take it nice and easy is my motto."

"I guess it would be just as well if we don't think about Bill and Betty Ann any more," she replied to his observation about Kraft dinner. "We're never going to see them again, anyway. We got a postcard from them in 1935. I was happy they got married. We haven't heard a word since. Maybe they went to work in a plant during the War. They could be anywhere now, but I think they would have liked this place."

The man was dishing up the Kraft dinner and hamburgers. They would have their dinner and then do some fishing. They would eat their dinner off cheap plates on the couch. When they started eating, they never said another word to each other until they were finished.

"Maybe they don't even fish any more," he said, bringing two plates of food over to the couch where she had just sat down. "People change. They give up fishing. A lot of people are interested in miniature golf. Maybe Bill and Betty Ann don't feel like fishing any more."

"I suppose," she said. "But we're too big to play miniature golf, not unless they wanted to use us for the course, Father."

They both laughed and fell silently to eating their hamburgers and Kraft dinner.

I had become so quiet and so small in the grass by the pond that I was barely noticeable, hardly there. I think they had forgotten all about me. I sat there watching their living room shining out of the dark beside the pond. It looked like a fairy tale functioning happily in the post-World War II gothic of America before television crippled the imagination of America and turned people indoors and away from living out their own fantasies with dignity.

In those days people made their own imagination, like homecooking. Now our dreams are just any street in America lined with franchise restaurants. I sometimes think that even our digestion is a soundtrack recorded in Hollywood by the television networks.

Anyway, I just kept getting smaller and smaller beside the pond, more and more unnoticed in the darkening summer grass until I disappeared into the 32 years that have passed since then, leaving me right here, right now. .

Because they never spoke during dinner, I think after they finished eating they probably mentioned a little thing about my disappearance.

"Where did that kid go, Mother?"

"I don't know, Father."

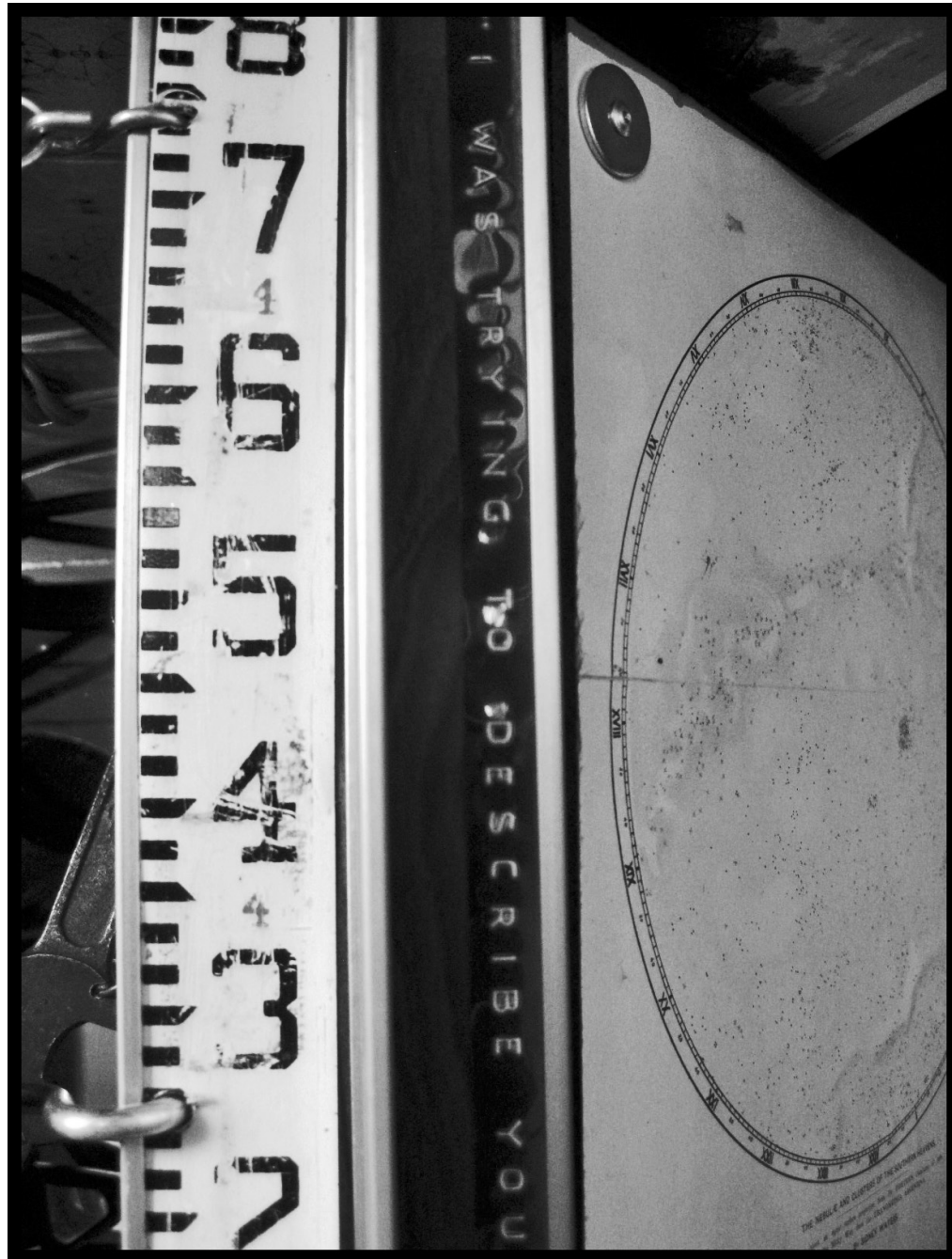
Then they rigged up their fishing poles and got some coffee and just relaxed back on

the couch, their fishing lines now quietly in the water and their living room illuminated by kerosene-burning electric floor lamps.

“I don’t see him anywhere.”

“I guess he’s gone.”

“Maybe he went home.”





Martina Newberry



White Road

A meno di una goccia di sangue rimane in me che non trema.
[Less than a drop of blood remains in me that does not tremble.]

Don't throw me no drag now, she said.
I don't. I won't.

While you still hear me, I'll tell
my tales as candidly as I can.
These are wretched times—
times that poems can not fix,
and we are living them.

We are stricken with lies,
and food that leaves us hungry,
and the vivid marks of war,
like stripes on the backs of our souls.

This is what I ask of you:
that you stay to the end of this poem—
at least this one.

While you still hear me,
there are things you should know—
they may be bruised,
but there are still apples, tart and cool from a tree,
and while the sky is definitely falling, there are,
now and then,
patches of beryl, cerulean, and iceberg,
still haunting it.

We are not kissed by fortune,
nor blessed by happenstance,
so there is reason to fear,
and, that being said,
while they may be hardened
by work, by slavery, by rancor or pain,
there are still hands, warm caresses on our heads.

And, while the nourishment of good sex
is undervalued, and turned sometimes into revenge,
the bare calves of a lover beneath a quilt
still sustain and condole.

I'll throw you no drag, no matter what.

I say *live*, even precariously, even sadly.
Live, you who are left to listen,
as though the notion of life intrigues you,
as if living is all there is to do,
even as it remains a velleity.

* * * * *





Prison Education from the Inside Out: An Interview with Casey William Hardison

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<https://goo.gl/xZ96rU>

The first thing you notice about Casey William Hardison is his winning smile. It's a huge grin for a man who has spent the last decade of his (still young) life locked in a prison cell in a foreign country.

In April 2005, Casey was convicted and sentenced to 20 years imprisonment under the United Kingdom's Misuse of Drugs Act for manufacturing and distributing LSD, DMT, and 2C-B. On May 29, 2013, after serving almost ten years of his sentence—3,395 days, by Casey's count—he received “conditional release” and was deported from the UK.

After his release, Casey returned to the United States with his English wife, Charlotte Walsh, and promptly got as far away from cages and walls as he could. Now, he's living in a cabin in the Idaho wilderness near Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks. When we last spoke he was making extreme ski and snowboarding films, and watching deer, geese, and the occasional moose in his yard.

Long before his legal trouble began, Casey had already started using his own experience to illuminate new (sometimes psychopharmacological) pathways and challenge dominant ways of thinking. That's actually the second thing you notice about Casey: his spirit is unconquerable.

Prior to his incarceration, Casey was a contributor to the *MAPS Bulletin* (“An Amateur Qualitative Study of 48 2C-T-7 Subjective Bioassays,” Summer 2000), as well as to *The Entheogen Review* and *Erowid*. He's currently writing a chapter entitled “Cognitive Liberty: The Right to Alter My Mental Functioning” for Tom Roberts and Harold Ellens' forthcoming book *The Psychedelic Policy Quagmire*, and beginning a bimonthly column for *Erowid*.

Brad Burge (BB): Can you give me a little background about how you came to learn about psychedelic research, and what first got you interested in drug policy?

Casey William Hardison (CWH): I got interested in drug policy quite early on. I realized there was something funky about it as soon as I started being targeted by the “War on Some People Who Use Some Drugs.” I think it's actually Jonathan Ott's phrase, but it was used by the November Coalition (november.org) as well. It just always struck me as another form of discrimination that is not focused on by the majority of people. The people who tend to focus on it, and understand it, are those that are actually using the drugs that are not preferred by the majority, although cannabis is becoming preferred by the majority.

BB: Is there something that separates the drugs that are preferred by the majority and drugs that are outcast?

CWH: I would actually say that some of the drugs that are preferred by the majority cloud one's judgment and do not have one looking at the unconscious contents of their mind. Some of the drugs that are not preferred by the majority, psychedelics in particular, have you look at the unconscious contents of your mind.

I certainly looked at my mind as a result of consumption of those, and started questioning authority in a way that those in the majority probably wouldn't appreciate. I don't want to create an "us and them" out of it, but the people that made the legislation for the drug war, that became the culture war, were probably concerned with the health and safety of their children and thought they were doing the best thing. It turned out many years later that probably wasn't correct.

If you read [David F.] Musto's book on the origins of the drug war, *The American Disease* [1973], you can see that the early movement for the Opium Wars in particular was simply economic, a way of keeping Britain out of the market with China. For it to continue to this day, it still seems economic. It seems like a way for the U.S. military and its friends to get involved in countries so that they can control resources and people. The idea that we're spending so much money to imprison two million people for drug offenses alone in the United States seems absolutely ridiculous.

BB: When was the first time you felt you were personally a target of this drug war?

CWH: The first time I got arrested was in my car on the Fourth of July, celebrating freedom, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in downtown Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. I got pulled over and I had a small jar, a glass handmade blown glass jar from a friend of mine with marijuana in it, and they didn't like that, so they arrested me. This was '94 or '95, and I realized this was not going to stop. This was going to keep going until people stood up and said, "No, this is not acceptable."

I think that's when I first realized that I was a target, properly a target. I mean, there were hints that I was a target as soon as I started proclaiming I was going to school to make drugs. People were like, "Shhhh, don't tell anyone," and I knew then that I was involved in something that was going to leave me subject to the law.

BB: So why, when you felt the hard hammer of this law coming at you, did you not say, "Okay, I'm just not going to use weed anymore," or "I'm just going to go and find another career?"

CWH: I doubt I could have articulated it at the time, but I thought what they were doing was wrong. I knew it wasn't fair. They can grow their weed—tobacco—and they can sell it to everybody, and yet I can't grow this weed and smoke it. It just didn't seem right.

I don't think I could articulate that effectively until I heard Richard Boire's "cognitive liberty" argument: the idea that I had the right to alter my mental functioning as I see fit. I enjoy the mental states produced by cannabis and psychedelics, and I didn't see why, if I enjoyed this and I'm not harming anyone, I should be stopped from doing so.

BB: How did you come across the idea of cognitive liberty?

CWH: I think it actually came from a pamphlet, just a simple pamphlet from the Center for Cognitive Liberty and Ethics [cognitiveliberty.org; formerly the Alchemind Society] in 2000. I found it on a table at the Palenque Entheobotany Seminar. I thought, *that's brilliant, this is the centerpiece, the key to unlock the whole thing, because inside the speech that we have the freedom to speak is thought, and inside that thought is so much authority and power.*

I don't want to say it so simply, but the church and institutions have, over time, tended to want to control what people think. I realize that there was just a long thread of connection through that idea. I think Jonathan Ott attempted to articulate it in the intro to *Pharmactheon*, where I think he attempted to envision the future of religion. Thomas Roberts also talks about academic and religious freedom, and the study of mind.

I think Richard Boire took the idea and ran with it, and wrote a series of articles, and they were just epic, they were beautiful, and I was converted. I'm a shameless proselytizer as it is, so I made up these flyers that had Alchemind on one side and MAPS on the other, and I also had Alchemind paired with Erowid flyers, so I was giving these away at all the festivals that I was going to, thousands of them.

BB: Around 2000, when you were handing out these flyers, MAPS was still trying to get a lot of the research started that we're now conducting. What for you was the value of scientific research for changing the War on Drugs?

CWH: I was promoting MAPS in particular for the experience that I had with psychedelics. I had experienced an exceptional catharsis that just felt like I cleaned out years of skeletons from my closet—you know, just put them out, a yard sale—anyone who wants them can have them. That came through my experience with LSD, but when I had my first experience with MDMA, I was absolutely blown away. I was in a world where communication became so simple, where it was so effortless to communicate with authenticity and integrity.

BB: Did that attitude of openness and authenticity help you while you were in prison?

CWH: Absolutely. Conveniently enough, in England I was able to decorate my walls as I see fit most of the time. I was receiving the *MAPS Bulletin*, *The Entheogen Review*, and other publications, and was able to put my iconography up on my wall, which often led people to wanting to talk about what that iconography meant.

I had one of the back covers to one of the *Bulletins*, the pill chart. There was a serious amount of pill-taking in England, so I could always interest the prisoners and prison staff alike. The prison staff might be wearing that nice uniform but many of them had experienced MDMA or Ecstasy, as it is in the pill form in England.

So there was always a way of bringing people into the conversation, the idea that there is healing to be found through this stuff, that you can strengthen the bonds you have in your relationships, that you can get through difficult conversations that you might be having with your friends, family, and loved ones through the use of psychedelics, or in particular MDMA.

I was able to enlighten a few people directly as to the experience and effects of some psychedelics as a result of generous individuals being kind to me whilst I was in prison; that's coded, and anybody can decipher that how they wish. Most importantly, I think I promoted a spirit of open and direct communication with people.



The people that would congregate around my cell were into taking a look at their life. I mean, they were in prison, they had six walls to focus their energy. I hunted for people that seemed open, seemed like they were on the path. I'd pick 'em out, single 'em out. I'd just do that, as often as possible, with anybody who could stand still long enough for me to do it. So many people in prison experienced the effects of clown shamanism, a sort of impromptu therapy, whether it was iconography or words.

BB: So there's a therapeutic aspect to the education that happened in prison about psychedelics?

CWH: Generally. I was able to take over a philosophy class in prison for a couple of weeks. I was able to teach, tutor science and math, for people that were in prison who were trying to better their lives. I did a physics degree while I was there.

We had an Open University room (Open University is the distance education that supplies a lot of prisons around the world, but we had our own computers), and we'd sit in there, and have conversations for long periods of time. And there was a philosophy class and people would move just to be near me, just so we could communicate.

BB: Did you develop lasting relationships with any of these people?

CWH: I think I developed probably a couple dozen lasting relationships that will endure through time. I've communicated with probably a half dozen since I've been out in the last two months, but I've been on the road. I think several of them will look me up later in time, and if I ever get back on Facebook, some of them will come find me.

BB: What was the first thing you wanted to do when you got out?

CWH: I really just wanted to sit still for a moment, just breathe the air. I wanted to head towards the wilderness eventually, get in the hot springs, make love to my lovely wife, Charlotte Walsh, and just drink clean water, eat good food.

BB: If you could start honest and open conversations about psychedelics even in such a challenging and hostile place as prison, that gives me a lot of hope for our culture at large. How can people best participate in changing attitudes?

CWH: I think the best thing individuals who are interested in shining a light on these things can do is arm themselves with accurate information—though I don't even want to say armed. I don't want to answer a drug war with a war. I want to undermine it; I want to take its foundations away. It's founded on legislation, and if we look at the legislation, we realize that only Congress has the power to make such rules, and that only Congress is going to solve the problem.

I think that the real answers are going to come from the law. What the framers of the Controlled Substances Act in America were trying to come up with was a rigorous format for regulating the production and supply of drugs that they thought might cause harm were they not used wisely. I can understand where they would freak out and think, "Wow, they're not being used wisely," because a bunch of hippies in the '60s took them, and got really wild, and caused a lot of questioning of authority. I could see how that scared them, and they wanted to grab a hold of it as fast as possible.

The law isn't written badly—it's actually a very well-written law. Both the United States Controlled Substances Act and the United Kingdom's Misuse of Drugs Act have the ability to create under them a regulated supply of all the substances that they say are controlled now.

BB: Are there smaller steps that can be taken to make these big legal changes happen faster?

CWH: Speak honestly with your friends. Stand up and say, "I do this and I enjoy it. This has created benefit for me. I experience joy and liberation through the use of these chemicals. These molecules have shown me new ways of thinking and being." There's no more to it than that.

I'm not saying go out and broadcast it to the police, but I'm saying, amongst your friends and family, speak honestly and openly about it. There's nothing to be ashamed of. We are bags of chemicals walking around, and we can transform the way we perform through our diet, which includes our food choices, our drink choices, our drug choices, the air we breathe, and the environment we feast on with our eyes. Our diet is not simply the food choices at the supermarket.

BB: So are there places and situations that you can see where people can feel comfortable sharing that?

CWH: Obviously there's festivals and things like that, but that's not going to bring everyone together. That's not going to bring all the people that we need for this conversation. There's also the idea that as we age, this becomes less and less of a problem in society, that as the old guard dies off, we get an opportunity to transform the world.

BB: Was there anyone in particular who you remember being able to help by educating them about psychedelics?

CWH: I had one particular guard who was experiencing difficulty with his son and autism, and his wife and him were having difficulty communicating about it. He was reading some stuff that I handed to him in regards to [Stanislav] Grof's "perinatal matrices," and that started an in-depth conversation that lasted for several months about his child's birth experiences, and the mother's experiences during the birth process as well. That actually led to them opening up a conversation with each other.

He never told me whether they actually went out and found some MDMA, but I get the idea that they did, and that they broke through the barrier that they had about their son. I think they were blaming each other for the fact that the child wasn't what they expected, but that he was perfect in the way he was created, in the way he exists. And they let go of that blame and found more peace with each other.

I also had one particular prisoner who became a very good friend of mine. He'd grown up violent, in a violent household, on the streets, and he was in for violence. He hadn't killed anyone, but he was going to if he kept on the way he was going. I started talking to him. Strangely enough, underneath all that environment, all that shell, was this person that was very gentle and very pure and innocent.

I sat for him one day when he smoked some DMT, and his whole outlook just shifted. Suddenly he was like, "Wow, I don't want anything to do with that world anymore." His whole world became about educating himself about science and mind and consciousness, and how he's going to make DMT in the future.

BB: The fact that he was in prison already didn't affect his potential future plans to illegally manufacture drugs?

CWH: By sending people to prison, you're giving them a "time out" in the corner. It's an occupational hazard for so many people that it's just part of the process. In Her Majesty's Academy of Crime, you meet new connections, you establish new relationships, you network, you get out of prison, you create bigger crimes.

The prison system is a wonderful way of taking dangerous criminals, and sometimes making them more dangerous, and sometimes steering them into less dangerous occupations. There are people who have been in and out of prison 30 or 40 times that I've been with, and maybe through my interactions with them they'll be in prison less and they'll create less crime.

BB: So by talking openly with them about psychedelics, you were giving them an alternative viewpoint that they could use to change their lives.

CWH: In talking with these individuals, I really was creating Temporary Autonomous Zones, safe spaces for them to speak and just be themselves, where no one was judging them, no one was telling them what to do. I wasn't telling them they were bad, wrong, dirty or shameful—which is what a lot of them were really used to—but just creating a safe space where people can just unload and be themselves. It was pretty much my job.

I read a lot of depositions of people's crimes, and some people had done some absolutely atrocious crimes that I'm glad they're in prison for, but at the same time I had to live with these people and respect them as fellow human beings, someone who breathes and shares the same space I do.

I think I survived the process quite effectively and quite easily by creating an attitude of minimal judgment. Some of the people I was in prison with had never hugged a tree, never been in nature. They were city kids their whole life. They'd never seen the beauty of the world, never been to the beach, never breathed in a beautiful sunset, and maybe through breathing in some of the stuff that I encouraged them to breathe, they might transform their way of being. Get more honest with themselves. Clean their house and help others do the same.

Nobody had stood still long enough to even hear who they were, to see them, and to encourage their potential. I did that a lot, letting people know, "You're not a failure, you're not a fuck-up. There's nothing to be ashamed of. You're a human being who's learning on this path. This is where you are now."

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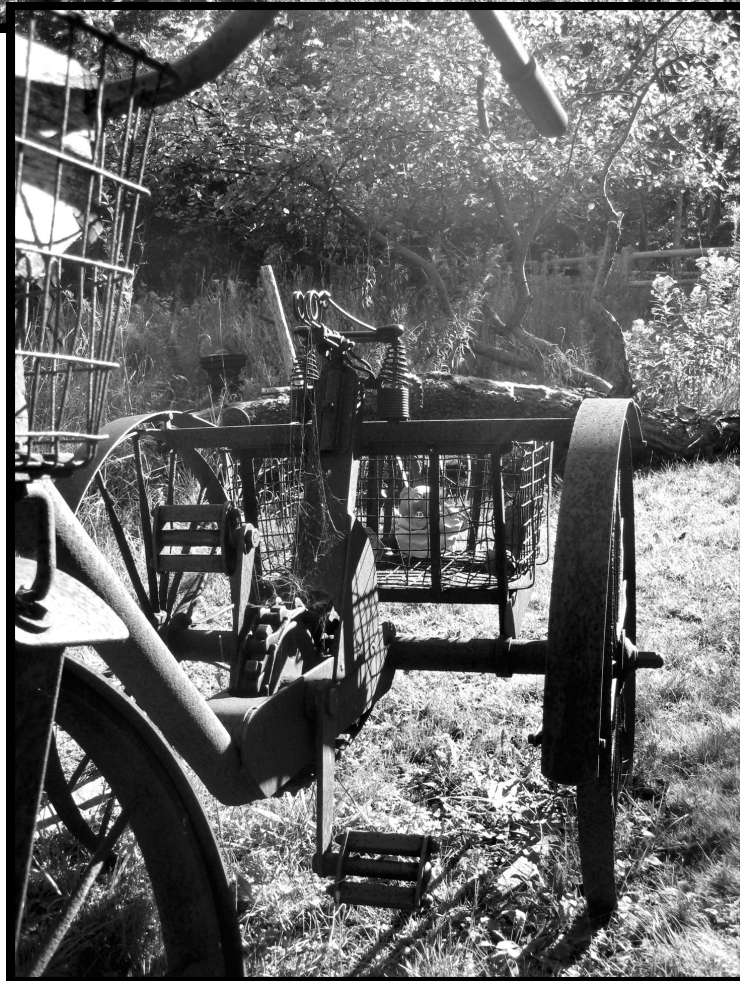
Tom Sheehan



Pick-up Kid Brother Charlie to Astronaut

This star reconnaissance began on the fourth of July, quick morning soft as a fresh bun, as warm, air floating up stairs and coming across my bed in the smell of burnt cork or punk as smoky as a compost pile rising upwards from lawn debris night had collected, spent rockets askew in gutters throughout the town, wide clutter of half-burnt paper and tail sticks themselves once afire in the nightly sky, signals that gave darkness a newer dimension of lightness and sound, and the explosion of circular flares too bright to look at, as if the sun had delayed departure for the heart of our celebration, as if stars had loosed their final demise amid the spatial junk they might encounter in outer reaches, friction of them in the measure as silent as Indians in the past on these fields and paths of flint and rock, even as children younger than I was went secretly about their ways, and quiet roads and padded lawns collecting expended shafts of excitement, rolling them into fistful quivers of their hands, tightly against their noses smelling the residue of them, dross and dregs of sky-reaching powder that short fires had implanted on their thin shanks as black as the night was, so that when amassed in one child's hand a match was re-applied in secret, and the gut blaze of the celebration began anew for those without money to buy their own pyrotechnics, the red-blue-red and orange-green flames loosed by this competition excelling much I might have seen on the holiday eve, these young scavengers, that young army of excitement seekers like a fresh wind adrift on the dawn, my younger brother Charlie, one of the aimless searchers of ignited celebration goods, marked all the way across a vast lawn, where the flag was left hanging out all night, by his red hair and fiery eyes aglow, even before the false dawn flashes, nimble legs in drive gear and nimble fingers at the bundle sticks awaiting new flame, oh, my younger brother Charlie, long ago appointed to the same bedroom as I, who would decorate the walls with Neil Armstrong's little dance down the ladder of time, and across tempest tide of skies, and blur of our black and white television set, this younger brother of mine who dreamed and reached the stilted aerodynamics of lads, who exaggerated his heart and his agile mind for the unseen, the unknown, that deepened pit of darkness the skies offer to imaginations leaping for the wonder of endless contact, sweet abrasions of the universe and all its parts, the coming global wanderer, aeronaut and astronaut and star traveler now out of the tightest innards of the smallest bedroom Neil Armstrong carried on his back, this fiery-eyed, dreamy, celestial kid brother in endless orbit, and sending me these late signals from far turns of the once-dark universe whose reception began in ample ignition beneath fistful hand, like a wondrous booster for his tell-tale heart, now making no sudden moves.

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Labyrinthine

[a new fixtion]

Part Eleven

*"I must create a system,
or be enslaved by another man's"*
—William Blake, "Jerusalem."

xxxiii.

The Heroes were not currently on their lecture tour when they decided to meet at the Ancienne Coffeehouse in the Village to catch up on things, talk of new adventures—

The imp, tiny cackling Rosa!eeta, arrived first & immediately joined her fellow tiny pandy bears on the game board of Spot On, to cackle & gnatter their news.

The blue & pink piglet, Belllla, came in sometime later & found R! amongst her friends. The two sat together & R! told Bellla that she had heard something had spooked the shy & colorful Moosei, Minnie & Maxie, two many-colored moose, well-liked amongst the Creature-folk.

Someone nearby was listening & a gruff but friendly voice said, "I think I can tell you more about this if you come along with me." This was a handsome brown bear sitting in an old armchair. His green sweatshirt said, "Maine," but he went by the name Memphis.

Well, our Heroes agreed to come with him, & they went outside together. Memphis had his Bike Wagon parked nearby. This lovely old contraption was a three-wheeled bicycle with a small basket on its handle bars, & a much larger one mounted between its two back wheels. The Heroes got into the back seat-basket, & Memphis began to pedal all of them out of the Village, a fairly small place, & back deep into the White Woods, where most Creatures live.

They rode up a stony path, one of few in these White Woods, until they came to an old stone bridge. Memphis stopped pedaling & helped his new friends out of the basket. Then he led them down a long rocky hill that descended to under the bridge. There they sat together.

"I couldn't talk freely back there so I brought you here to tell." Memphis's eyes were large &

looked a little scared. The Heroes leaned forward to listen closely.

“The Moosei haven’t been seen in awhile because they were spooked by hearing that there was a place in these Woods where the colors were going strange. So they decided to investigate. Colors are very important to them, since they have so many. They worried it might start spreading.”

“How do you know all this?” asked Bellla.

“I have a friend. I can bring you to her. She might know more,” said Memphis.

The Heroes nodded yes, & their thanks.

“I have heard all about your Heroic Journeys,” said Memphis. “I like how you say anyone can be a Hero with some courage & pluck.”

The Heroes smiled & nodded. R! gnattered to Bellla, who seemed to agree, & said, “Would you like to come with us on this Heroic Journey? We would like it very much.”

Well, Memphis’s eyes got big again but he nodded many times. “We can use my Bike Wagon as far as it will take us.” So it was decided.

They got back to the Bike Wagon & settled into their spots, & Memphis pedaled on. Another slow path, steeply upward. Eventually to arrive at another bridge.

They got out & Memphis led them to one side of the bridge where he took a special notice of some ferns growing near the side of the bridge.

“Flora? Flora? Are you home now?” he called, several times.

And eventually, a girlish bunny nose poked out from among the ferns & the Heroes could see a round hole that ran deep into the wall of the bridge. A long narrow home within, with a bedroom at its far end.

Flora came out, clad in a pretty green dress that looked made of moss & green leaves. Memphis gave her a hug & explained why he’d brought the Heroes.

“Flora is a kind of Checker,” Memphis said.

Then she continued. “If any of the local Creature-folk have a reason to go into these Woods & possibly be gone for days, they come & check in with me. That way I can reassure their friends & loved ones, if need be.”

The Heroes nodded admiringly. Memphis said eagerly, “Did the two colorful Moosei come this way?”

She nodded. “They came about the colors going strange.”

“Which way did they go?” asked Bellla excitedly.

Flora put her paw on her chin, thinking deeply for an answer.

“They said they were told to travel up six White Oaks past this bridge, & then turn left into the Woods, using the *Hmmm* they were given. That would lead them along their way.”

“Who told them?” asked Bellla eagerly.

“They didn’t tell me. Just their mission & the *Hmmm*. It went like this—” & Flora taught them the *Hmmm* so they would know it well for when needed.

“I wish you well, Heroes,” Flora said. “Your journey indeed sounds grand.”

And, well, maybe because she was a little wistful, our Heroes invited Flora along too, & after a minute of contemplation, & another of tidying up her little home for while she was away, Flora was then ready & climbed into the Bike Wagon amongst her new & old friends.

Then she remembered something & hopped quickly out. Memphis stopped the Bike Wagon to wait for her.

Flora went & fetched in her home a piece of paper & a pencil & wrote a note to leave by her door.

***GONE OUT
DO ALL CHECKS
WITH AUNT AT PENSIONNE
BACK SOON***



Then she hurried back & hopped in the Bike Wagon. Memphis raised his brown furry paw to let them know they were off again, & peddled on.

Slowly again up the hill past the bridge & slowly as well counted off the six White Oaks of the instructions. 1 . . . 2 . . . 3 . . . 4 . . . 5 . . .

Ah, there! 6. Memphis turned the Bike Wagon into the White Woods, & all took to *hmmming* to guide their way along. The obscure path opened up to their *hmmming* quite plainly.

Eventually, the trees gave way to a beautiful wild field of goldenrod.

“Are we still on the right path?” asked the Heroes of Flora.

“I’m not sure beyond the White Woods, & the *hmmming*,” admitted Flora.

At that moment, all of them noticed a little blue Tree Nymph sitting calmly on a stalk of goldenrod. After greetings, the Heroes asked if he had seen the colorful Moosei.

“Why, yes. They explained to me their mission to find out why the colors were strange in a certain place, & if it could spread elsewhere,” said the friendly Nymph. He appeared to be a clever-faced little whiskery thing.

“Did they say anything else?” asked the Heroes.

“They asked where the Copper Mushroom was. They were told to take a right at the Copper Mushroom,” Symon said.

Well, this was new so they asked about it. And he told them it was not far, just beyond the edge of the field they were talking in.

Now Memphis spoke. “Say, would you like to continue with us, along this Heroic Journey?” Everyone in the Bike Wagon liked this idea.

Symon smiled his clever smile & was hopped aboard in two shakes. Memphis raised his paw, & they were again along their way.

The colors began to get stranger as they rode along, back into the Woods, & they were lucky to have Symon to direct them. But even he was only doing so mostly by memory.

Eventually they came to a murk that would have halted them completely if Flora hadn’t pointed to something purple & fine moving about in the distance ahead. Memphis pedaled very slowly forward & they could see twas a purple furry bowed dancing Creature, & his colors were not strange at all as he danced with his various ribbons with no seeming cares at all.

What’s more, he was dancing beneath the Copper Mushroom! So they knew to turn right.

The Heroes called out a “Thank you!” & he responded by dancing along in front of the Bike Wagon. This allowed Memphis to pedal along through the murk safely.

So they continued riding along through the Woods when they came upon a crimson-colored bear who was in a sort of workshop, sorting amongst his tools.

The Heroes stepped out & said hello to him. Asked how he was doing.

“Not very well, I’m afraid. You see, I was going to tend my garden today but, what with the light here being strange & all, I can’t seem to figure which tools to use for what.”

The Heroes nodded sympathetically & then asked if he had seen some colorful Moosei pass by.

“I did,” Melbourne the bear said. “They had the only colors that looked right until I saw your purple furry friend come along.”

“Would you like to come with us? We want to find the Moosei & help restore the colors if we can,” asked the Heroes.

Well, Melbourne then knew these were the famous Heroes of legend & figured anything he could do to help, he would. “And then I can finally get to my gardening, & afterward get to a really good nap.”

Eventually, the murk gave way to actual night & they pulled up among some trees. Memphis had some blankets & pillows stored under the seat-basket of the Bike Wagon & so they were able to cluster & sleep together in comfort in the Bike Wagon, in these wrong colored White Woods. Wondering where the Moosei could be, & how they were doing. Not knowing how much farther & deeper along the Moosei were. The dancing purple furry Creature danced all night & watched over them.

xxxiv.

The colors were still strange by daylight, but they found that by focusing on Pirth's purple dancing ways, they could see OK still.

So they got comfortable in the Bike Wagon, Memphis raised a paw, & they rolled along behind Pirth through these not quite White Woods until they came to the shore of a great pond. It, too, did not look quite right to the eyes of these Creatures.

Then they spied something sort of following them along, in flashes, & decided to veer from the edge of the pond back into the Woods to investigate.

Eventually they came out to an open green field where they found a little brown-&-white pup playing a game with a little brown-&-white ball. He would throw the ball down the field, & it would come rolling back to him. Sometimes he would kick the ball high in the air & it would land a far distance, but always roll on back to him.

They rolled on up to them, & said hello. The pup said, "I am Mr. Brisbee & this my associate Mr. Eli." They introduced themselves in turn.

Mr. Eli, who was friendly, bounced up to each of their paws & let them throw him afar & then returned each time.

After they played ball with Mr. Eli for awhile, the Heroes asked if Mr. Brisbee had seen some colorful Moosei pass by here.

"Oh yes," he said smiling. "They played ball with us for awhile, & they even tossed Mr. Eli back & forth with their antlers. He liked that."

"We are trying to catch up to them, to help them discover why the colors are all off & sort of funny," said the Heroes.

Mr. Brisbee looked around for a moment. "I guess Mr. Eli & I were so long in our game of ball, we didn't notice."

The Heroes looked at each other & nodded. "Would you like to help us on this Heroic Journey to find the Moosei?"



Mr. Brisbee looked surprised & then looked them over closer. "Are you the Legendary Heroes of Yore?"

The Heroes nodded but said, "Anyone can be a Hero. You & Mr. Eli included. Come along with us!"

So it was agreed. Mr. Eli & Mr. Brisbee got in the Bike Wagon, & Memphis raised paw, & resumed pedaling.

Then, after they'd rolled along a long while, they heard a noise in the trees around them. Didn't know what it was until suddenly a handsome little monkey fellow appeared before them. He greeted them friendly.

"My apologies, friends, but when I get to jumping & swinging from branch to branch, I forget about everything down below."

The Heroes nodded & then asked if he had seen the colorful Moosei pass by.

"Oh yes," said he. "They said they were headed for the place where the colors began to be strange."

"They're strange all over here now?" asked the Heroes.

"Oh yes," Jacoby agreed. "I can hardly swing safely anymore for fear of missing a branch & crashing."

The Heroes explained that they had been gathering a good group of Heroes to help, but they didn't know how far away the Moosei were, or if they were following the path well.

"Oh, I think I can help," said Jacoby. "While I can still climb, I'll go up to the tallest tree I know & take a look for them." He pointed to a tree nearby.

So he began to climb, climb, climbing up, stumbled, climbed, stumbled, but kept going up & up till he emerged on top of all the trees of the Woods nearby.

He looked in every direction of the weirdly colored Woods & saw nothing, nothing, nothing, but then, there! in the distance, colors as many & as unmistakable as that purple furry dancing Creature down below.

So he came swinging & stumbling his way down, stumble, down, until he fell & crashed! Right into the Bike Wagon. Unhurt because so many blankets & pillows to fall on.

But he popped right back up, brushed himself off, & said, "Glad I did that now. I won't be able to climb much till this colors problem is solved. I saw the Moosei & they are very close to the Wide Wide Sea. That's the place to go."

The Heroes were very impressed. "Even though you cannot go so high right now, we think

having you along would be a great help. Would you come on this Heroic Journey with us?"

Jacoby felt very complimented & agreed. The Heroes in the Bike Wagon made room for him, & he climbed on in.

Memphis, seeing how many passengers were now in the cab, unfolded out a safety bar to rest on their laps hereon. "As two little friends of mine say, 'Safety First!'" Then he raised his paw & they rolled on.

Eventually they came in sight of a steep mountainous path, a rocky climb up into unknown heights. This could not be climbed by the Bike Wagon, so all got out & the Heroes recalled their first Heroic Journey, when they climbed in the rain & hurricanoes up Mt. Cloudy Day.

The Heroes led their long line of their new friends, climbing, stepping, trying not to stumble among the ascending rocks.

"One step at a time," the Heroes cautioned.

The Heroes moved step by careful step up this rocky path, & the new Heroes felt like this is how they would know heroic adventures better.

The Heroes paused their climb & told their new friends to look down the rocky path they had come along so far. The new Heroes trembled to look but did.

"This is what Heroes do. They go on adventures to help others. They take care of one another along the way, & they find a fascinating story to tell at the end. That's all you need to know of being a Hero."

The Heroes recalled vividly how that first climb had been doused in rain, darkness, & a crumbling path up &, only by encouraging each other along, could they continue.

But their present climb was just getting harder & harder as they pushed on. They might have kept going too when Jacoby spied a little grey squirrel in a bright orange hat, sitting in a tree, watching them.

"Have you seen some strange & colorful Moosei come this way?" he asked.

The squirrel shook head. "No. But I can see them in a distance far yonder." And he pointed from where they'd come.

Memphis said, "It must be the strange colors trying to pull us off our trail." The Heroes agreed.

But Brisbee noticed the squirrel's hat was not a murky weird color at all. "Maybe you would like come with us on our journey to find the Moosei? It looks like your good hat would be a nice beacon to guide our way." Brisbee had noticed even Pirth's purple color was dimming strangely.

The little grey squirrel put his paw on his chin. "Sure you don't just want my hat? It was given me by a friend who said in times of trouble, it could help. Like now."

All the Heroes assured that they wanted him & his hat, & so they all climbed down together & found where they'd left the Bike Wagon.

Well the Heroes might been bit a little disconsolate about having to return down the unclimbed mountain when the next event occurred to fill their minds.

They came of a sudden to a seeming impenetrable pass of stones, rocks, & boulders, one it looked impossible to roll or pass through. Seemed like their journey was halted in place. And they were so tired from that climb.

All seemed despairing when there was the quiet sound of wings flapping & a beautiful white bear appeared before them.

"I think I can help you Heroes out," he said with a smile, & he told the littlest Hero to touch paw to his, & each to touch the next in line. Memphis, who was in the rear of the line, heard a whisper in his ear, "touch paw to your Bike Wagon."

And thus they all rose above the rocks & boulders, & floated by hours & miles to arrive eventually to the shore of the Wide Wide Sea.

"Unfortunately I can't fly you over the Sea to where the Moosei are bound," Boyd admitted a little sadly.

They didn't have a boat, or any other way to go.

That was when the Heroes gathered their new friends around & said, "Many's the time we have reached a moment when a Heroic Journey is stalled like this. But we have learned if the Journey is truly heroic, & one meant to help, good will occur."

Bellla, who was speaking, continued. "We must not despair. Not despairing is most of the game. If one despairs, one slows or stops or makes a mistake, or turns back, & does not go on. Not despairing means trying & trying & trying. And then you have a chance."

It was then that the littlest Hero looked up & started to cackle, & gnatter, & point some more.

Coming toward them all *thwup! thwup! thwup!* was the famous shiny green-scaled Calgary the Sea Dragon!

He thwuped amongst them. He was not as big as he gets. He said, after landing, "I can bring you to the Island where the Moosei went. They got a ride by me," he admitted. "Did not know any were pursuing them till now. Hope I did not do wrong."

The Heroes assured Calgary he did nothing wrong. “But if you give us a ride that would be good too.”

So Calgary grew bigger & bigger until he was big enough to take them. The Bike Wagon rolled on up to Calgary’s noggin. And then . . . *thwup! thwup! thwup!* They flew into the sky over the sea.

As Calgary flew on into the night, the Heroes settled back in the Bike Wagon’s seat-basket, clustered together, not to awake till next sunrise on the beach of the Island, under a palm for protection where the Sea Dragon had brought them.

xxxv.

The Heroes got ready to go, but the newer Heroes wondered where Calgary the Sea Dragon was.

“He will be back. Sometimes he has others to fly around or help,” explained the Heroes.

Everyone was safety-barred into the Bike Wagon, Memphis raised his paw, & he began to pedal into the sorta White Woods. The weird warping of the colors here was even more pronounced than the previous Islands. But Memphis pedaled slowly with Pirth dancing ahead, & Shelbee & his glowing orange hat perched on Memphis’s handle bars. Flora also suggested they keep *hmmmming* as they had been, & this was comforting too. They got a feeling of rightness from doing it.

Soon they came to the Path of Roots & Rocks, a difficult path to travel even on paw. It was impossible for the Bike Wagon to roll along, & Memphis had to stop. Everyone pushed up the safety bar & climbed out.

“I guess we’ll have to walk it,” Memphis said sadly. He wasn’t worried about the safety of his unique vehicle so much as liking getting folks where they were going. Flora put a paw on her friend’s shoulder to reassure him it was OK.

After awhile of climbing in & among the large roots & rocks, though, some Heroes carrying others, the Heroes new & old began to tire. Then Eli, who was carried in Brisbee’s paws, began to jiggle for his attention. He told Brisbee his worry.

“Where’s the little imp?” Brisbee asked the others. They all stopped struggling forward & began looking for her in bushes & behind nearby trees.

Her heroic partner Bellla wasn’t so worried. Rosa!eeta was indeed an imp, a kind of trickster coyote full of her games & shenanigans, but she never left a Hero’s Journey unfinished.

And sure enough, suddenly in the distance came the sound of a wild delighted cackle & a *honk! honk! honk!* of a familiar vehicle.

All the Heroes new & old hurried best they could up the path to discover the imp delightedly honking the horn of the famous Kittees Boat Wagon! Like Memphis with whom they were the huggingest of friends, the Kittees Jonny & Jonny (pronounced with a j- & an y- sound to differ, though nobody knew which was which), & Calgary too, of course, seemed to know when someone needed a ride.

So everyone piled into the back seat of the Boat Wagon & the Kittees made sure they were all buckled in (Safety First!). Between the Kittees in front sat their dear Friend Fish, Murmur by name, a beautiful goldfish, & she smiled lovely at them all.

The Kittees waited for a signal to start & it came when the imp *honked! honked!* the horn again. Each Kittee had pedals below for two of their paws & a steering wheel they shared between them. Friend Fish sat perched between them on a little cushioned seat.

To traverse the Path of Roots & Rocks, the Kittees had pressed the CLAWS button on their dashboard, & the Boat Wagon's wheels had retracted, & climbing claws came out.

The Boat Wagon climbed steadily along among the roots & rocks, & the new & old Heroes rode with ease, enjoying their view of the White Woods, its many varied tall trees & wee sprouts, tho the weirder colors of everything around them was troubling. And even, distantly, the sharp, salty smell & *whoosh-whoosh* of the Wide Wide Sea.

It was Jacoby who noticed the white flash the Heroes had seen earlier, in the more distant trees, & nudged Bellla to look. Bellla watched a passing moment & then called, "Hello, come along here, old friend!"

And in less than a breath, the White Bunny MeZmer was hopping alongside the Boat Wagon as it came to a slow stop.

Bellla & Rosa!eeta jumped right out to hug that Bunny & the rest of the Creatures followed. MeZmer could tell from the crowd assembled that her friends Rosa!eeta & Bellla were on another Heroic Journey.

She invited them to take a little nap at a place she called FernKassi. "Very restful," she said, her meZmering eyes twinkling with smile.

So they left the Boat Wagon on the Path & followed MeZmer into the kinda White Woods to come eventually to a great green patch of ferns. Big & small, so many of them. MeZmer hopped right into them & the rest waded in too.

They eventually came to a sort of bowl-shaped center to FernKassi where the ferns dipped lower & more densely to form a kind of couch-bed. And there was MeZmer's well-known companion in all her travels & adventures, a small grey hedgedyhog called Holly. He squeaked his delight to see all these new & old friends come to FernKassi.

Many of the Heroes could hardly stay awake long enough to cluster together in the fern couch-bed. Warm, safe, peaceful day, & their mission going well, at least so far. They napped.

Early afternoon all woke, & it was time to move along. The Heroes told MeZmer & Holly about their current adventure.

MeZmer pointed to the ferns around them & observed the colors were a little off. Holly looked at MeZmer & said even her powerful glow was not quite right either.

The Heroes invited MeZmer & Holly along, which they happily agreed to. They wanted to help.

So they all returned to the Boat Wagon, climbed in, buckled up (Safety First!), & continued to roll along toward the increasing scent & sounds of the Sea. Came out of the Woods finally to behold the wordless beauties of the Wide Wide Sea.

And there was someone waiting for them, a Creature friend familiar to them all. He was a black bear wearing a handsome yellow bowtie, named Shatzi.

“You must come along quick, my friends!” he said, excited & waving.

“To where?” asked the Heroes.

“To the final Island of your great adventure. The Moosei are waiting for you!”

“How did you end up on that Island with them?” asked the Heroes.

“Well, I was there having an adventure of my own,” he said. “Flora knows because I checked in with her.” She nodded & smiled.

“Then the Moosei came. I have to say, the colors were already confusing me when I met them, & they explained that that was why they’d come. So I paused my search for my friend to help them.”

Everyone nodded & listened.

“Then Calgary the Sea Dragon came & found us. He was how we had all come to this Island, & he was checking on us. Especially because of the colors.

“He also said there was a group of great Heroes coming to help the Moosei in their mission. The Moosei said I should return with Calgary to the second Island & fetch them, all of you, as quickly as possible.

“So Calgary flew me here & said I could lead you in the Boat Wagon to the third Island. He was going back there to be nearby if the Moosei got into trouble.”

So Shatzi got into the Boat Wagon & buckled in with the rest (Safety First!), & the Boat Wagon rolled into the Wide Wide Sea, Kittees now paddling furiously to get them to the third Island. Shatzi pointing the way. Colors getting wigglier & wigglier.

It took a good several hours to finally arrive to the rocky shore of the third Island. The Kittees

paddled the Boat Wagon right up among the rocks. Further up the shore, near the edge of the Woods, napped Calgary the Sea Dragon.

Calgary greeted them, & pointed one of his green shiny paws toward where they should enter the Woods.

“Let’s keep up our *hmmming* as we go along,” said Flora, & everyone agreed & joined in.

As they went along, the colors got weirder & weirder. Despite Pirth’s dancing glow in front of them, Shelbee’s hat glowing in the Boat Wagon’s front seat with the Kittees, & MeZmer’s glowing fur in the back seat, the Kittees were pedaling slower & slower, since it was no longer clear what was path & what was tree. The *hmmming* was barely keeping them along their way, & their Heroic Journey was looking perilous.

The Heroes looked at the weirdly colored anxious faces of their crew & said, “Remember that we must stay true to our Journey, & our wish to help.”

Everyone *hmmm*’d even deeper & the Boat Wagon kept rolling on somehow.

One more roll of the wheels & the Heroes came to a very strange place. It was a clearing, & in its center was the Moosei. The Moosei were glowing very calmly, & the colors around them were the natural ones that couldn’t be found anywhere else. The Heroes & the Boat Wagon included.

The Heroes hurried up to the Moosei & said, “You did it!”

The Moosei were not happy though.

“Only here. We can only do this for a small area like this. We’ve tried, & the natural colors travel with us. But the further we get from this clearing, the less area around us stays colored right.”

For a moment, nobody knew what to say. Then the new Heroes sort of grouped together, & talked among themselves for a bit.

They returned to the Heroes & the Moosei, & Melbourne spoke for them. “We have been learning all about Heroes & adventures, & we think we should stand around the edge of this clearing, paw to paw, & *hmmm* together, with our eyes closed, & think about all the things & folks we love, & their natural colors, & try to amplify the Moosei’s colors.”

So they did. They spread out to the edge of the clearing, leaving the Moosei still glowing in the center, & touched paw to paw, & closed their eyes, & all set to *hmmming*.

MeZmer & Holly thought about the beautiful ferns in FernKassi. Melbourne thought about his garden & gardening tools. Jacoby thought about the many kinds of trees he would jump & swing through. Brisbee & Eli thought about the big green field they liked to play throw & catch & kick in. Shelbee the squirrel thought about his orange hat & how it was a magickal



gift from a friend, & it made him feel less jittery sitting up in the trees. Pirth thought about the Copper Mushroom he liked to dance under & its coppery color. Flora thought about the bridge she lived in, the cool tinkling water that ran under the bridge, & the ferns that were the door to her home. Boyd thought about flying over the bouldered path around a great pond in the White Woods, flying over the water itself, above the trees, & how he liked to touch paw with Creatures & bring them on travels. Memphis thought about his lovely Bike Wagon & traveling Creature folks from here to there. Symon thought about that field of goldenrod he liked to perch & nap in many an afternoon, listening to the wind, looking at the sky.

Shatzi had come here because of looking for his friend, the dancing black & white pandy bear, & so he thought of the many nights they would dance together under the moon & stars. He did not notice right away that his dear friend, attracted by the *hmmming* & natural colors, had come to the clearing too, & joined right in.

The Kittees & Friend Fish thought of all their marvelous travels in the Boat Wagon, on the Sea & on the land too. The Kittees thought about their friend's beautiful yellow self, & Murmur thought about the Kittees' so-bloo eyes.

Finally, the Heroes thought of all these new Heroes & the many adventures they had had together, & how lucky they were to have them all along now to put all to right.

The power of paw to paw, & the *hmmming*, & the love & gratitude all were feeling began to *whoosh-whoosh* pulse in & out like a heartbeat, & the natural colors of the clearing began to push out like a widening bubble in all directions, & this soon spread to the whole Island they were on, & on & on.

Calgary the Sea Dragon woke up from his nap & said softly, "I knew those Heroes could do it."

The natural colors pulsed beyond the Island, into the Sea, into the sky, & the previous Islands they had traveled through, & soon all the six Islands, & the whole world was now thumping with returning colors.

Finally, there was a delighted cackle of the littlest Hero, & a click, & that was that, all colors back in place.

All the Heroes were laughing & cheering for, however this situation had occurred, whatever, the White Woods had a cold, or some extra love was needed to be given, it's hard to say, now everything was restored to order.

And so our dear Heroes all piled into the Boat Wagon, including Moosei, Shatzi, & his found friend Bauer the bear, buckled in (Safety First!), & rolled back to the shore.

They met Calgary the Sea Dragon who laughed his charming gruff laugh & congratulated them on their success.

“How about a ride back to the second Island, my friends?” he said.

They all agreed happily, & the Boat Wagon rolled onto his great tail, & up & up & up to his noggin, & he took off with a great *thwup! thwup! thwup!* high into the air, & flew them all breathlessly excited through blue sky & clouds to the shore of the previous Island.

Let them roll off before taking to the air again. “See you on the other side, my friends!”

So our Heroes rolled back along the Path of Roots & Rocks, Boat Wagon CLAWS button pressed of course.

They came to where they’d left the Bike Wagon, & all the new Heroes climbed aboard it &, like a two-car train, the Bike Wagon & Boat Wagon rolled along onto the beach where Calgary waited.

Since the Bike Wagon did not float, Memphis drove it right up onto the agreeable noggin of Calgary, & he *thwup! thwup! thwup!* flew it & passengers high up in the air, while the Boat Wagon, Kittees & Friend Fish at the wheel, classic Heroes in their triumphs in the back, paddled below in the Sea.

It was a bright sunny day all around them, sun its natural yellow, sky its blue, clouds their white & grey. Sea its blue-green mix.

Eventually they returned to the Island they’d come from, & all looked natural again. Calgary landed the Bike Wagon just as the Boat Wagon rolled up from the Sea.

The classic Heroes stood up in their seats & said, “You new Heroes have done wonderfully in this Heroic Journey! We want you to ride foremost into the Village as we all return in our triumphs!”

So the Bike Wagon, with Memphis at the wheel, paw up to begin, biked & biked till arriving in the Village.

Everyone knew, of course, that the colors had gone wrong, & that the Heroes were helping the Moosei to figure it out. And then the natural colors returned & it was time to celebrate.

As Bike Wagon & Boat Wagon rolled into the Village, everyone from the region came to cheer & cheer the classic Heroes & their new Heroes crew.

Everyone went into the Ancienne Coffeehouse to celebrate long into the night, & hear the many tales of this Heroic Journey.

Singing, *hmmmm* &, as sweet surprise, Bauer the Bear taught them all the dance he had contrived from all this. You start out curled small, arms & legs close, head down, no colors, & then you *hmmm* & *hmmm* & reach for the paws near you, & spread & spread till all the colors return. It was danced many times.

At the end of the night, we find our friend Memphis, back in his armchair, tucked out from this adventure, & all his driving. He may take a day or two off.

Sitting in his lap, also all tucked out, is Bellla. Fast friends, napping together.

On the Spot On board nearby, the imp Hero was back with her friends, & they were cackling & gnattering to beat the band.

xxxvi.

Maya smiles me immediately.

“So how did the weird colors happen?”

I shrug, edge away. “White Woods had a cold? Needed some loving?”

She impedes my path. “I figured the answers would come along the way.”

“Would?”

“Might?”

“Might?”

“Do you need an answer?”

She nods, devil’s girl herself.

Then relents. “Some answer? Aren’t you curious too?”

“Eh.”

“Please?”

“OK.”

“Well, it began when I was in a car, with my father, driving to the bank, to deposit, he starts more listening to the radio than counting the bills.

“So I pushed all the stacks of bills helter skelter in this fake leather suitcase, & I left him to listening to ‘Jump’ by Van Halen. Swaying roughly in his old-young body.

“Left the bank. I put the case on a banker’s desk, him talking to someone. ‘Soulard,’ I said. And left.

“Took awhile to get my camping gear together, to get what I needed in New York City, & get out on those subways. One after the next, slow, breaking down, everyone onto the platform, *next one’s coming soon*, no, it’s not, not till 10,000 people are standing on this blistering platform. But I made it. Too fucking stubborn not to.

“To get where I’m going with what is needed, *what I have*, is delayed again by the office I have to pass through. Up twenty floors off the ground, seated windows, all that, & there’s an office party going on. Good time to get on the network, get that spreadsheet with the hidden tab, & its map, & I’m about to leave when the guy comes up to me & saying how I should operate. His voice is deliberate, slowing down, confuses me, The air chokes as he talks. The colors thin.”

Maya nods. Like I made at least one point here.

"So I get out, nod, agree, *get out*, not breathing right, colors off, but still get out, with the map I need."

I pause. Maya nods. She'll take this if I'll I finish this.

"The map in hand helped me some. I made it to the Woods, & was able to use just one cube of LSD to help me travel horizontally, I get a long way fast, then less so, then I slow to a still.

"I stand. I walk. No more mystics or magics. Just legs. I walk & walk, seem to find about the one road ever to run through these White Woods—"

"A road in the White Woods?" Maya asks. It spooks her serious.
I nod.

"Then I come to the well, & I drop in what I'd brought all this way, & that's when the colors started to go weird."

"There's no well in that story," she objects.

"It's there."

"No, Raymond, it's not."

"They don't see it."

"Creatures *don't see* something?"

"No. They don't."

"Why?"

I shake my head. "That's the story. No more." She glares at me. I glare back.

She relents. I relent.

"There's more. I need the last pill."

She nods, smiles a bit.

xxxvii.

[Next pages begin like this: I'm speaking aloud, & later writing this down. So, speaking then, writing now. In between, typed those speakings. Now writing them. Then now ever on]

It is night. Maybe it's night that gives me the confidence to think: *Yah, I'm going to say something worth saying.* The night has always seemed to me like an open door.

And, speaking of open doors, I go over to that one, in the night, and I push it open, and I walk in. And there's a little table, and on that little table there's a little book, and I think to myself, *oh, I know these kinds of books, oh yessiree. I've been around these kinds of little books, these are Secret Books. Yes, sir.*

And I pick up this Secret Book, and I think to myself, *well, whatever I am going to find in here, it's going to be pretty good.* And so I open up the book, and I see, *ahh*, it is of course about the

Travelers. Here are many lines that my finger, covered in bandages from an event earlier that day (that I will not go into now), begins nonetheless to scan, lines about the Travelers. I begin to look for notable information.

The Travelers, well, you see, *they travel*. They travel in strange places, and they have strange adventures, and they meet all sorts of strange individuals.

And I look, and I read that, *ohh*, this is the time when Marie the Schoolteacher and her friends, the White Bunny and the little cackling Imp, were told to go into the Sea, protected by the White Bunny's glowing fur, and they found something really good deep in the Sea.

They found a beeee-uuu-tee-fulll Garden. It was an underwater Garden, and yet, if you looked at it, it was filled with beautiful blooms. Now, admittedly, they were wavering in the movements of the Sea, not the movements of the wind, but they were still beautiful. And there were rows of them, the way you would have in a garden, & things looked orderly. And then they found a little hut.

And Marie knew that politeness dictated that they knock upon the door, and perhaps offer a compliment, if this was indeed the Gardener they found inside. And the door opened, upon knocking, and what came out was best called a Sea Bee, a bee that lived under the Sea. And you could probably say he looked a little bit like a fish too, because of course wings wouldn't help, way under the Sea, but fins would. But he was yellow and black, like a bee, and he tended this Garden, as bees are very interested in gardens, under the water or not.

And so Marie said, "You have a beautiful Garden. I've never seen its like." And the Sea Bee said, "Wow, what a nice thing to say! Where are you traveling to?" And Marie explained that she and her friends were on a mission to find this mountain that used to be near where she lived, and had gone missing. And so the Sea Bee said, "Well, you see that green light pulsing wayyy up there, toward where the surface probably is?"

And Marie nodded, and the Sea Bee said, "You go to that green light, and I think it will help you on your way."

And they said goodbye to the Sea Bee, and began to make their way back up to the surface.

And I just decided to stop there, and read a little about something else. And so I found and read some lines about Marie's brother Joe.

Joe was looking for Marie, who was not at the school she teaches at that day. And he was told to go into the Sea, and he did. He told his friends he was traveling with—the Ladybugs, the Hedgehog, and the red-and-yellow Truckee—to wait for him on the shore, and he walked into the Sea.

And he dived down deep, because he was a good swimmer, and he found down deep in the Sea a Woods, a real forest, beautiful trees, they were growing from the floor of the Sea. And what was lucky about it was that, within these Woods, when he swam into them, the water didn't



come. He went from swimming toward the trees to walking among them. Deep under the water still. It was the most amazing thing he had ever experienced. And yet it was true.

And then he came upon a frog and a toad, and they said, “Well, hello. What are you doing down here?”

And Joe said, “Well, I was told to go into the Sea, because I’m looking for my sister Marie. I don’t know where she is.”

And the two little fellows, who introduced themselves as Starbuck the Toad, and Ollie the Frog, said to him, “Have you ever been to an underwater Woods before?”

“I don’t think so,” said Joe. “This is quite the place.”

And the little fellows agreed, and they showed Joe around. And he said, “I just have to ask you a question. How is it that the water doesn’t get in here? We’re deep under the Sea, right?”

“Oh, yes, we are,” the little fellows said. They continued: “Well, when the trees first came here, they realized if they were going to have any good company, they were going to have to form a place that people could find and visit who were from other places, and weren’t fish. The fish could come too, but they didn’t want fish.”

“They didn’t want fish?” asked Joe.

“No. They wanted a secret place that people would happen to find. And so what they did was that they bonded together. And the water was kept out by the will of the trees.”

Joe said, “Is that possible, scientifically?”

And the little fellows said, “You’re here, aren’t you? You’re with us.”

And so Joe agreed that, despite it being quite improbable, he *was* there with them, walking among these beautiful trees. And he thought: *this is not going to help me find Marie, but I just have to stay with these little guys for awhile, visiting this magical place.*

And then I turned the pages and I thought: *you know, I have time for just . . . one more . . . little bit. I’m just going to open up to a page. I’m just going to dip in one more time.*

And so I dipped in, and I found myself reading about Daniel and his friend the Tumbleweed. Now they are big fans of maps, strange maps, and what happened one time was that they were visiting their friend Jacoby in his cave. And Jacoby said, “I have this map for you. I know you like to collect them. The problem with this map is that it’s broken.”

And they looked at Jacoby, who is a brown monkey fellow, and Daniel the Traveler said, “How can a map be broken?”

And Jacoby said, “Everyone who has gone into this map has not come back. Everyone who’s tumbled in, the way you do that, has never come back.”

“Why do you have the map?” asked Daniel.

“Well, people have learned that I am a friend of yours, and they figure if Daniel the Traveler tries to fix this map, he’s got the best chance with his partner, the Tumbleweed. Do you dare to tumble in?”

Daniel and Tumbleweed talked in their silent tongue about this, and then they nodded. And so Jacoby laid out the map in his cave on the floor. And Daniel the Traveler and his friend the Tumbleweed got into a crouch position. The way they would do it would be like a diver diving into the Sea from a high cliff. They would dive into maps the same way.

And so Daniel would be back turned to the map, and he would execute a flip dive into the map, and Tumbleweed would follow. And they did their usual diving but, when they did, they immediately saw it was broken.

It was a broken map. They weren’t in it right. They weren’t in it cleanly. They felt themselves stuck between arrival and not-quite-arrival. And then they realized there were others around them, in the world of this map, that also had not cleanly arrived, and therefore couldn’t leave either.

And Daniel said to Tumbleweed, “It seems to hold onto people by their warm flesh, and you’re not made of flesh. So keep going!”

And so what the Tumbleweed did was, he tumbled! He tumbled down to the ground, and he made it, unlike the others who were all stuck. And he began to roll along, looking for what was going on, and then he saw it in the distance. It was a Glowstorm.

And he was a brave Tumbleweed, let noone tell you otherwise, that a Tumbleweed can’t be brave. He had to save all these people. And he rolled miles & miles to the distant place where this Glowstorm was striking. And it was a broken Glowstorm. It couldn’t finish its cycles. And because the broken Glowstorm couldn’t finish, all the Nature in this map’s world was stuck.

And Tumbleweed dived deep into this broken Glowstorm that couldn’t finish, and he let the parts of the Glowstorm re-connect through him. BOOM! CRASH! KRACK! BOOM! CRASH! KRACK! And the Glowstorm was able to finish its cycles, it glowed and glowed and glowed. And eventually its energy was spent, and it diminished and diminished and diminished, till it passed.

And the Tumbleweed fell to the ground. He was a little singed, a little battered, but he was a tough fellow. And so he rolled back to Daniel, and called up to him, where he was stuck, & called: “Daniel, tell everyone to take a deep breath, and push hard!”

And so Daniel let that order go out to everyone who was stuck to push hard! And for the

next while, Tumbleweed just had to get out of the way, as bodies were falling from the sky everywhere. Everyone got through, with little or no injury.

I closed that Secret Book, smiled, and thought: *Wow, that was something else.*

xxxviii.

A gorgeous long-legged many-colored spider coming at me, *oh yes, please, tell me, know me, know me you this world me, I am what?*

Closer. *Closer.* I wake up crying.

Wake up in the hotel bed, the strange room, the girl whose name I don't know, she tried to tell, I shook my head. She sleeps naked, with one arm & one leg hanging off the bed, like ready to roll off & keep going in retreat or pursuit.

Night doesn't start that way. She wants to be my orange slice, every inch tasted, sucked, *possessed.*

A part of me loves this, how she wants me, how we seem to meld in our fucking, it's never been like this before for me, it was always *me fucking you* or *us fucking*, & the orgasm ridden like a wave back to shore. Always back to shore. Always *you & me*. Always *us*.

This girl is different. I *know* she is programmed. I *know* that she's more like a dog learning his master's voice, hand gestures, moods.

Yet. Something. How she ends up half off the bed. How she asks me questions I don't know. Like there is in her brain unformed areas, pools of curiosity, not tied to the task of obedience & pleasure giving.

"Why is A first in the alphabet?" she asked once. We were walking hand in hand through a strange carnival we found way out in the country, one of the Sunday drives I liked us to take in my restored Triumph TR7.

I shake my head. "Can't you access all the nets to answer that?"

She swings my hand, thinking a moment. She's learned that behavior from me, but I do it less & less. "They tell how it is so, theorize about the origin of language. But not why."

It's called "X's Creature Carnival of Mysteries & Wonders." Run by sentient . . . beings? Programmed too? All sorts of small animals perform, run the booths, attend the patrons kindly.

That morning we were in a club called Lumina, which can only be found in our city in the early morning. A certain street, an old diner, & the alley next to it, camouflaged? You see, I didn't know but I did know that I often missed both diner & alley & ended up on some other street, & too later in the morning to go there.

But guess right, & down the alley next to the diner, & usually a right turn then, & a set of cement stairs with a sort of deformed metal railing, & there's someone usually to check your ID & your explanation for coming. And you enter then, & seems like there's a stage toward the back, large & old, yet all around you is pale Woods, the music, dreamy ambient this morning, you've come with her to dance here, you've come here to dream & remember & know better—

She was slow to let go my hand but I make her, she knows we'll dance together later, knows I have to find the books & do my work. Does she fear we'll lose each other? We're connected to each other by the chip embedded in the palms of our hands. *It's not possible to lose each other by mistake.*

So again, a trait, more than a function. An idiosyncrasy I didn't teach her, is illogical.

I enter the White Woods alone, & the music diminishes rapidly as I walk along. I am *hmmming* as I was taught, the only way to get anywhere or find anything here.

Why books deep in these White Woods? How did I find them? Questions with answers that are right even if they don't fit, don't make sense.

I *hmmm*, until what's around me relents, & joins in. These Woods shimmer a little, waver back & forth like a strong wind, release a little, release a little more, I am now in the Place of Art, & its many many books.

Miles & floors of books. The trick here is to concentrate, touch volumes, *hmmming*, & see which ones soften a little to your touch, which nod, perhaps smile, & release to your hand.

Touch one & hear a thought: "*how long since last I was read?*"

Touch another: "*I am not for you yet.*"

Touch another: "*You're getting nearer.*"

*These are living beings
Wood touched with words*

xxxix.

You know those dreams so immersing that what before & after them not distant or simply forgotten but never was—

A reinvented world with some pieces of this one & some pieces of others—

At the desert festival, as I ever am in a way, with my father & true love, driving our chrome red sedan—

I am walking alone along a low row of RVs in a kind of murky light, & I pull open the door

to one & I enter it, step up & right on in, & I'm looking around for something, find a set of keys sitting in an ashtray—they seem important—

Then friends of the RV owner come in, too, & they think me a friend they haven't met yet—

The girl with an arrow straight through her neck—it's not a toy or fake—it's been surgically added within her neck bones—

The man with three eyes &, again, one of them has been surgically added, to his forehead, was once someone else's, & now it moves in tandem with his, a microchip? a green one to contrast his two hazel ones—

A younger girl, but her face is wizened old, & I can't help but think this was surgical alteration too—*she feels old, she looks old*—

I laugh with them about something but don't know what because they only speak in click-clicks & noise-noises—

Move casually to the door, show them the car keys I nabbed, & indicate it's time for me to drive somewhere—more click-clicks & noise-noises, & we laugh & laugh & I wave my hand so friendly & jolly, blow the old-young girl a sweet kiss & am gone—

Hurry away, *hurryhurry*, fear chokes my breath in & out, & I have to get back to my father & true love & chrome red sedan—they're all waiting, & I climb in, & soon we're passing slowly by that same RV, door now closed, & my true love is sitting on my lap facing me, we feel sort of melded together in embrace—my father points to the sky excitedly: one of the new fish-planes is swimming the air, undulating higher & lower in the water-air, tail swishing back & forth, back & forth—

We drive into a big building, many floors, & through an open area into what looks like a pharmacy, & naturally get caught between two narrow aisles, unable to pass—

But nobody panics, or gets mad, as employees & customers join together to clear the way so we can drive through the pharmacy safely—everyone smiling & encouraging—

I wish & wonder & don't know why the world I wake back up in isn't so very often like this—

No, get back in there, is that merely Dreamland? No, that, *this, is really Dreamland*. Sure it exists, I don't doubt it.

Walking through the White Woods now, cool, peaceful, nearly completely still, save for me & a little breeze, glad of this little breeze so I'm not alone in moving—maybe hidden things are moving too—does the world ever stop moving? Is anything ever still?

No path, no destination, just the many varieties of trunks, leaves, grasses, bushes—just light

passing the long day to night's gradual embrace—

But then a structure, the kind of which I've never seen, narrow & endlessly long, like an ancient tunnel through the Woods, I pull & pull at the door, claw it open, it refuses me at first like I am not worthy, I think:

*I am a man & I am of this world
I don't understand this world
I wish to know but how?
Is it my imagination will help?
Is it my empathy?
Is it my heart when I open it?*

Door lets open enough & I squeeze through, feel like being sucked in & swallowed but then I am upright again & moving along—

It's somewhat metal, pieces old & rusty, & wooden, heavy old pieces, strips, the ground sometimes smooth, then earthy, then sloshy & rank—

Walk & walk, crawl, climb, & it's very quiet here, it's so quiet, but my breathing, my heartbeat, my steps & climbing along noisily—

Come of a sudden to a lounge, smooth, many calm colors against a great glare such as I can't distinguish floor from walls from other shapes—

I slow, I-in-time slows, lean against maybe a wall & sink, sink, sink, until I will to stop, & seat, it's molded around me, I will stop—*I am here*—

xl.

Jazz lets me read aloud some of these new fragments, reads others herself. The sentient girl bothers her & her grey eyes glare at me as she reads in her sweet, low voice. But the living-being-books she likes, & makes me read aloud: "*These are living beings / Wood touched with words*" over & over, loudly, whispering.

Likes the girl with the arrow in her neck. The ancient tunnel through the White Woods.

"I've been there," she says, but no more.

How old was she when I first found her in my bed? Has she aged since?

She's still mostly naked, tho I insist her into a pair of my boxer shorts; shaved cherry pussy sitting next to me on my bed, reading aloud my *Aftermath: Dream Fragments Appendices* is too much. Her tits are small but well-formed. Her face pixie-cute but her eyes too fiercely smart. Blonde hair past her shoulders, unbrushed, at least a couple of ribbons tangled carelessly into

it.

"We're awake. Both of us," I say, when we've run out of fragments to read. Till she'll make me write more. Which I will.

She nods.

"We weren't."

"No."

"You were looking for your sister."

"I still am."

"I don't understand this."

She nods. Her nods are uninformative.

"Should we have sex?" she suggests suddenly, her voice neither dismayed or excited about this. I consider. "Isn't there someone else you like?"

She nods, calmly. "More than one, really. But mostly Toby now."

"He is?"

"Ashley's old boyfriend, I guess. He likes me now."

"But the two of you are still looking for her?"

Nods.

"Where are you now?"

"Here, silly. With you."

"But you're with him too?"

Nods.

"Where?"

"It's an Island."

"You're here & there?"

Nods.

"How??"

She smiles & leans her lithe simply-boxered form into me, arms on my shoulders, half my size & completely dominating me. "We're not really awake, Cap'n Crunch."

"Who?" I try to retreat an inch but she clinches on.

"Your name. It's like a cereal I like. I put chocolate milk on it. Ashley makes faces, so I always wait till she's around to pour."

"We're dreaming now?"

Nods. Hands caressing me.

"In the same bed?"

Shrugs.

"So all that writing?"

"You did it. It's there in your notebooks."

"How?"

Her hand on my cock, teasing, squeezing, kneading to hardness, isn't easy to do, she's persistent.

Kissing my face & neck & shoulders.

I pull away. Takes it all from me, pretty much, but I pull away. She pouts, well.

"How can I help?"



"Do you want to fuck me?" A sincere question.

"Why?"

"You're pretty. You're sexy. You're smart."

"I'm a virgin."

"Yes. That too."

She nods, like collecting data.

"Will you?" Curious, like my choice.

"Does it matter?"

She nods, again sincerely.

"Will it help you find your sister?"

"I don't know."

"Then why?"

She studies me a moment. Her face intent on me. Touches my face. My old face.

"Maybe we both need it?"

I say nothing, wait.

"Do you love me, Cap'n Crunch?" she says softly.

I say nothing. "I don't know."

"Toby wants to."

"That's good, right?"

"I'm scared." She means it.

"You love him."

Nods.

"Why me too then?"

She smiles, real, sex kitten real. "Because it would be dirty & fun."

I nod this time.

I wake up, coughing worse than ever. No Jazz. Filled pages on my writing table.

Look out my window, push open the old, stiff curtains to do so. Night, but not so late.

There are people in the street passing by the No-Tell. Shouting, chanting. Carrying signs. Voices both angry & scared. Defiant. Stream past for a long time. There are police cars too, cops keeping the march from filling the street, blocking traffic. I watch & watch for the longest time. Make no move to go outside or turn on the radio.

The numbers dwindle after a long time, but the feelings in me do not. People in the streets means the world is rousing to something again. Good for some, bad for others. I don't know my place in it all.

Yes, Jazz. We will. Next time.

xli.

Sugar cubes floating in a pond, they kind of got away from me, the other guy saw them & said "aha!" because he'd thought so—but he can no more get at these little lysergic treats anymore than I can—they just float & float—

Everyone else is getting ready for the exercises—putting on their uniforms, checking their magickal tools—confidence, purpose—

I am uncertain my place—I’ve been watching leaders emerge & everyone else choose their places—I’d brought the sugar cubes to help me decide, but they were lost now—

I ride my bike to where the activities will occur—pass through a tall building, through a bookstore, walking my bike politely—hear voices behind me—hurry on—

I come out to an open field where the others are grouping, & I go to the leader & ask his counsel—he is reassuring, he has confidence, but he tells me nothing—

I try to tie ribbons around my wrist, they mean something, I see others do this, it’s hard to do—

What tools shall I wield,
what group will have me?

O my fucking godd shit

she’s between my legs sucking me off like *FUCK*, & the ribbons are in her hair & she has me *so fucking deep in her throat*, sucking *slowwwly* in & *slowwwly* out & somehow me not quite cumming, *how’s that?*

I push her back, from her knees to sitting, she manages to graze my cock with her sharp little teeth, letting me out with an audible *pop!* & a mischievous grin—

“No.”

“Yes.”

“*No.*”

“*Yes.* We both need it.”

“That’s bullshit.”

Pouty lips, big grey eyes, “Doncha like me, Mister?”

I pull my shorts back up, painfully, & shoo her over to the bed.

“My old cock is not going to be practice.”

“Why not?”

I sigh. Silent. “You have to learn how to train it some.”

“What?”

“Your fucking sex drive.”

“Why? I want to fuck.”

“But not Toby.”

“Not yet.”

“I’m sure he will love it with you no matter what. You might impress yourself. Suck his cock

that way & you'll see."

"I . . . don't want to."

"Suck his cock?"

"It's not that simple."

"So explain it to me."

"I lied."

"About what?"

"I'm not looking for Ashley anymore."

"Why?"

"I, uh, made a deal, for protection."

"By who?"

"It's hard to explain."

"Try me."

"On the Island, Toby was bringing me to her. But I decided he was more important to me."

"Than your sister?"

"Yah."

"Are you sure it wasn't that you stole him from her?"

"I don't know."

"Why are you still coming here? You could have found her. You don't need me."

"I. I do."

"To fuck you."

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

I stand up. Push down my boxer briefs.

"Look at me."

"I am."

"*Look at me, Jazz.* I'm an old sick man."

"No, you're not."

"*Look at me.*"

But she is. Clear-eyed. Sitting on my bed, in my boxer shorts too.

I sigh. Sit down.

"Practice."

She nods.

"In dreams, so you stay cherry for him."

Nods again. Hint of a smile.

"Did you ever wonder if, while we were actually in that bed—"

"If we fucked for real?"

I nod.

"We didn't."

"Are you sure?"

She smiles. "Every night I would feel you feeling around me, touching, kissing. Always very gentle. I didn't want to reject you, so I would suck you off, just like now—"

"Every night?"

She smiles, nods. Licks her lips, for show.

“And that would do it?”

“Then I’d *hmmmm* you back to deeper sleep. You’d be smiling & content. It was enough.”

“Why more now?”

She shakes her head, doesn’t know. It’s not one of those things. She’s bonded to me. Fucking me is a thankee, & letting me go.

I walk over to the bed. It’s a pretty narrow one, always was. I motion her to come & sit on my lap facing me.

We begin to kiss very gently. Her taste is like nothing I have known for so *so* long. When life was a circus of questions, pains & delights, when the doors & windows all open, sky & stars outside.

She kisses harder, more needful, wanting me to want her, wanting my fierce yowling hands & tongue & torso, so I forget she is young, *whatever*, & I give over to her softness, to touching her where I will, to making her moan *for fucking me*, I make her suck me again but this time my tongue is finger deep in her tight bare cunt & her suckings grow lighter & arhythmic, *suck suck suck it down*, she does & before she’s done, she’s on her flat tummy face in the pillow & I am driving myself in her, hard & fast & deep, rent her again & again, force orgasms out of her till she is exhausted—young, she starts to recover but I am done, wake up, *Jazz, wake up, Jazz!*

“Wake up! It’s Toby. You’re OK, I promise. What were you dreaming?”



To be continued in Cenacle | 99 | April 2017

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NEW ENGLAND

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Nathan D. Horowitz lives in Vienna, Austria. His terrific prose in this issue is from his epic work-in-progress, *Nighttime Daydreams*. More of his work can be found online at: <http://www.scribd.com/Nathan%20Horowitz>. If there is, as some say, a cosmic balance in the Universe, it might be demonstrated by his returning to live in the US just as our new President Clusterfuck is taking office.

Colin James lives in western Massachusetts. His oblique poetry regularly appears in the pages of the *Cenacle*. Perhaps we will meet finally in person in 2017. Hoping so.

Martina Newberry lives in Palm Springs, California. Her dark poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 96 | April 2016. Her website is <https://martinaneberry.wordpress.com>. Reading Martina's poetry, because it is so beautifully written, very often makes me happy.

Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His melodic poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. He conveys to all seasonal wishes from a corner of his house built in 1742.

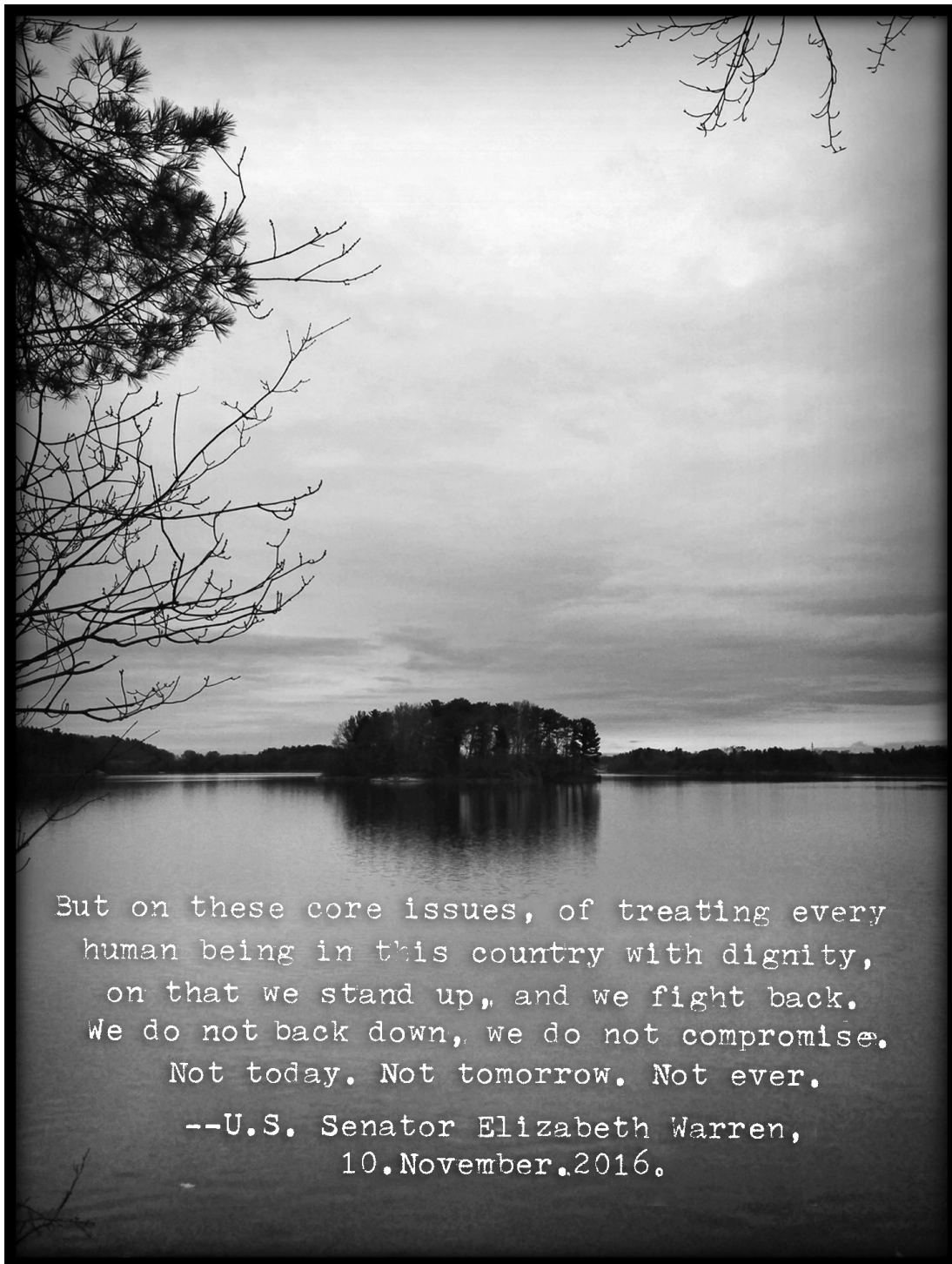
Kassandra Soulard lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. She is wearing the most delightful socks right now, colorful & snowy & warm. Something of this dearness enspirits this journal's lucky pages.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. While I do agree with the many who say 2016 was a rough year, I still believe the future is like a still pond, waiting many fingers to write its stories.

Victor Vanek lives in The Dalles, Oregon. His sometimes ethereal prose-poetry often appears in the pages of the *Cenacle*. He is even now mulling future writing projects and schemes.

* * * * *





But on these core issues, of treating every
human being in this country with dignity,
on that we stand up, and we fight back.
We do not back down, we do not compromise.
Not today. Not tomorrow. Not ever.

--U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren,
10.November.2016.

